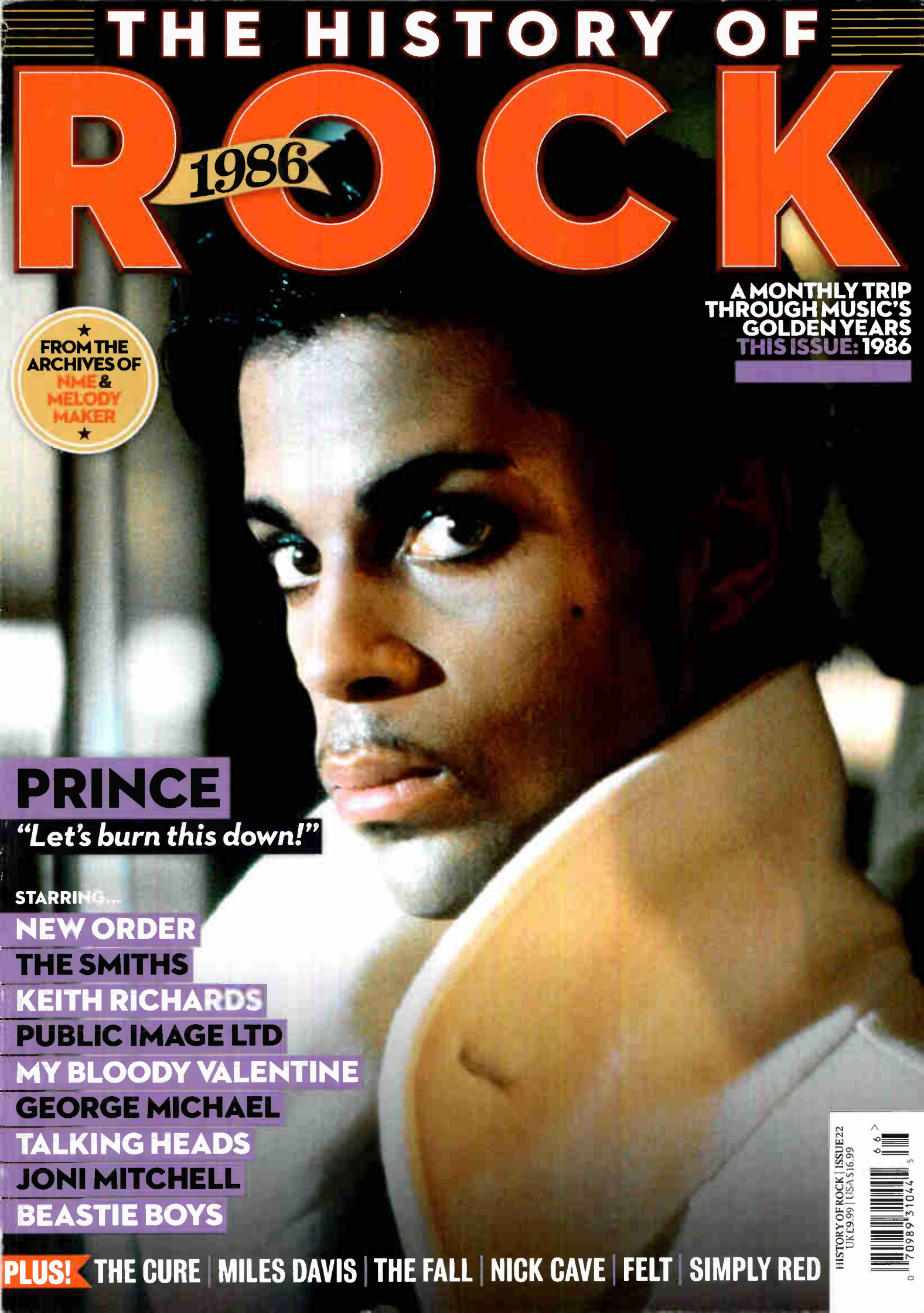
THE HISTORY OF ROCK

1986

A MONTHLY TRIP THROUGH MUSIC'S GOLDEN YEARS
THIS ISSUE: 1986

★ FROM THE ARCHIVES OF NME & MELODY MAKER ★



PRINCE

"Let's burn this down!"

STARRING...

NEW ORDER
THE SMITHS
KEITH RICHARDS
PUBLIC IMAGE LTD
MY BLOODY VALENTINE
GEORGE MICHAEL
TALKING HEADS
JONI MITCHELL
BEASTIE BOYS

PLUS! THE CURE | MILES DAVIS | THE FALL | NICK CAVE | FELT | SIMPLY RED

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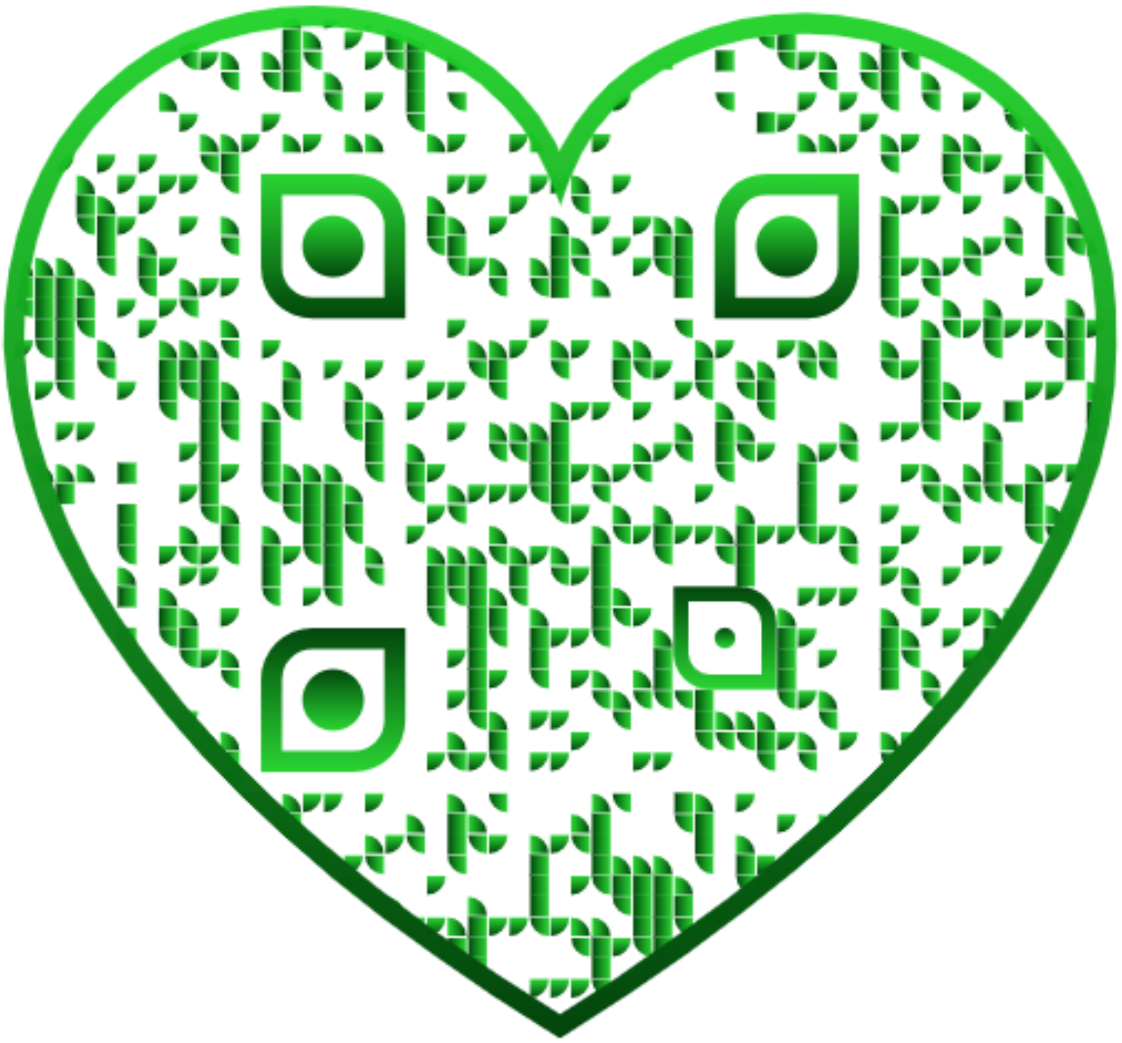

Welcome to 1986

THANKS TO *NME*'S *C86* cassette, a mail-order compilation of young and promising guitar bands, this is an unusual year, in that it seems to come with its own soundtrack album already attached.

In fact, though the music press of that year covers this emerging wave of groups such as Primal Scream, some of the most dramatic events of 1986 take place in front of larger audiences, and far closer to the mainstream. From their yobbish first appearances in public, the Beastie Boys quickly prove that their records are serious – and particularly serious about a good time. Mancunians Simply Red and The Smiths both develop wider congregations of ecstatic supporters.

Our cover star Prince, meanwhile, seems to dominate many people's thinking. He's made another excellent album, and another film. He's working with Miles Davis, and has become a topic of conversation. When in August he plays a run of shows at London's Wembley Arena, it leaves critics if not exactly speechless, then at least convinced that these represent an apogee of what might be possible in a rock concert.

It's true, he's not one for saying much. But in his stead, strong musical opinion flourishes from other sources. This year, The Go-Betweens, Nick Cave, The Fall and The Smiths all make landmark work – and don't just walk it, but talk it powerfully, too. Ten years on from punk, John Lydon has plenty to say about it, and his great new record. In the world of pop, meanwhile, George Michael and the Pet Shop Boys prove that thoughtful comment and a sense of mission aren't the preserve of groups with guitars.

This is the world of *The History Of Rock*, a monthly magazine that follows each turn of the rock revolution. Whether in sleazy dive or huge arena, passionate and stylish contemporary reporters were there to chronicle events. This publication reaps the benefits of their understanding for the reader decades later, a year at a time. Missed one? You can find out how to rectify that on page 144.

In the pages of this 21st edition, dedicated to 1986, you will find verbatim articles from frontline staffers, filed from the thick of the action, wherever that may be.

At the Haçienda, jousting ego with New Order's Peter Hook. Being told by Nick Cave that you, and every member of your profession, are scum. At the Brixton Academy, as Morrissey raises a sign to express all that the band's wry and empathetic music have come to mean in the last three years.

It says, "Two light ales, please".

1986 MONTH BY MONTH

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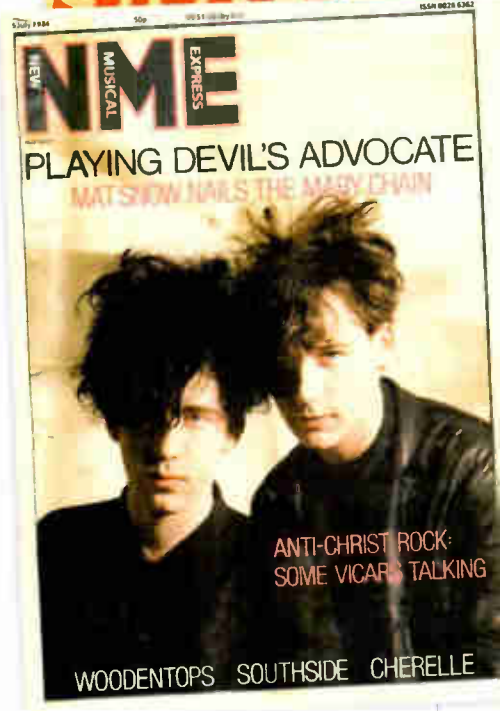

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THE HISTORY OF ROCK

Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, 3rd Floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE1 0SU | **EDITOR** John Mulvey, whose favourite song from 1986 is *Kiss by Prince* **DEPUTY EDITOR** John Robinson *Battery by Metallica* **ART EDITOR** Lora Findlay *Fall On Me by REM* **PRODUCTION EDITOR** Mike Johnson *Life Without Reason by Pete Shelley* **ART DIRECTOR** Marc Jones *Bizarre Love Triangle by New Order* **DESIGNER** Becky Redman *Fight For Your Right by the Beastie Boys* **PICTURE EDITOR** Phil King *Velocity Girl by Primal Scream* **COVER PHOTO** AF Archive / Alamy **THANKS TO** Helen Spivak **MARKETING** Nashitha Suren **SUBSCRIPTIONS** Rachel Wallace **GENERAL MANAGER** Jo Smalley **GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR** Paul Cheal **COVERS AND TEXT PRINTED BY** Wyndeham Group | **WWW.UNCUT.CO.UK**

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1986

JANUARY – MARCH

VIOLENT FEMMES, NEW ORDER, GO-BETWEENS, JOHN LYDON AND MORE

"A way to awaken myself"

NME JANUARY 18 Stop the presses! Down-to-the-wire stuff as Bono and Keith Richards record in support of the South African anti-apartheid movement.

YOU WOULD NEVER have thought that Bono Vox's harrowing "Silver And Gold" had been grafted onto the end of the Artists United Against Apartheid album *Sun City* almost as an afterthought. A dark delta blues song with just a gritty tinge of country, it provided the perfect sign-off line to an LP that had gathered together some of the biggest names in contemporary pop and soul in an expression of solidarity with the black South African freedom movement.

And yet the song – which features Rolling Stones Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood on guitar – was written, recorded, mixed and finally mastered in little more than 48 hours. In fact, producers Steve Van Zandt and Arthur Baker had to hold back the cutting of the disc one October morning last year just to include Bono's hot-off-the-desk response to the "Sun City" call.

Set in a prison cell, its subject matter is the economic plight of the oppressed black majority in that sad, savage country. The South African economy is based to a large extent on mineral wealth, the silver and gold, in mines that are worked by what is virtually slave labour, and this image is central to the song. Bono, however, cleverly extends the metaphor to encompass the crucial question of sanctions, the potential economic stranglehold on apartheid that our arrogant leaders so stubbornly refused to consider at the recent conference of Commonwealth ministers.

It is not that surprising to find the U2 singer so prominent in the Artists United project, all proceeds of which go to The Africa Fund, a charity that gives moral and financial support to political prisoners in South Africa as well as helping refugees in the West.

On their 1984 American tour, the one that coincided with the last US general election, U2 were becoming increasingly associated with a growing resurgence of the Stateside civil rights and anti-apartheid movements. Before playing the anthemic "Pride", for instance, Bono would regularly refer to the South »

REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

June 6, 1986: U2 at the Forum in LA during one of six Conspiracy Of Hope concerts across the US, staged to draw attention to the work of Amnesty International on its 25th anniversary

UNDERMINING APARTHEID

African struggle. On one date of the tour he even received a telephone call of encouragement from Bishop Desmond Tutu, one of the most influential black church leaders in South Africa.

Bono himself is guarded as to pop or rock's ability to actually influence political change and is wisely wary of any "U2 Save World" shtick, but the band's efforts in the States do, incredibly, appear to have had a minor effect: they were cited as one of the factors in reawakening the spirit of struggle at the Democratic party's presidential convention in '84 and an editorial in the *New York Times* also associated the Irish band with the perceptively shifting attitudes of a sector of American youth.

The singer, however, plays down his potential political impact: "I'm just like anyone else. I watch the television and read the papers and I don't really know what's going on, especially regarding something like South Africa. I really don't know. I'm just as numb and mummified as anyone else. I use my songs as a way to awaken myself. It's like sticking a needle in your leg after it has gone to sleep."

More so than even "Sunday Bloody Sunday" and "Pride", the latter inspired by Martin Luther King, "Silver And Gold" is the most specific political song Bono has ever written. According to its composer, it is set apart in a couple of other ways, too: "It's the first song I've ever written that comes from somebody else's point of view. U2 songs are always from my point of view, but this is a departure into the third person. It's also the first blues-influenced song I've written. I play the guitar with my foot miked up the way that old bluesmen like Robert Johnson used to do. And I'm banging the side of my guitar with my knuckles to keep the rhythm. As the song goes on, the tempo keeps getting faster and the mood more and more intense.

"The line that started the whole thing for me was one about a boxer, the idea of a prize fighter in his corner being egged on by a trainer. It's a sport that I've found increasingly interesting over the past year. I find a lot of aspects of it very sordid, a bit like cock fighting or something, but the image was very powerful for the song."

The circumstances leading to the link-up between Bono and the two Stones that play on "Silver And Gold", and the realisation of the song in so short a timespace, are covered in more detail by Dave Marsh's excellent book *Sun City – The Making Of The Record*.

Briefly, however, the idea arose following a studio conversation about the history of the blues between Bono, Peter Wolf (former vocalist with the J Geils Band), Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood in New York's West Side studio, where the Stones were recording. Bono was in the city for the shooting of the "Sun City" single video, and when he suggested that they record another song for inclusion on the album, Richards and Wood needed no convincing.

And, though their musical and personal backgrounds would appear to be poles apart, Bono was rather taken by Richards and Wood during the recording session that ensued: "Richards is the kind of person that sometimes gives the impression that he's in a world of his own over at the other side of the room, but he's actually very wide awake. He's a man with all the infamy and fortune anyone could want, and it all means very little to him.

"The music is the all-important thing to him. Whether you like or dislike him isn't really the point. The important thing is that he hasn't taken the bait and been middle-classed out like so many others."

"U2 songs are always from my point of view – this is a departure into the third person"

With the twin guitarist adding a dense, dank and eerily oppressive atmosphere to the track – Wood reputedly playing slide guitar with a switchblade! – Bono's vocal is an uncharacteristic but powerful guttural murmur, punctuated by shrill whoops. The mood is primal and basic, enhanced by Keith LeBlanc and Steve Jordan's percussive knuckle-dusting of a pair of cardboard boxes and lightened only slightly by the clarinet of *New York Times* jazz writer Robert Palmer (no relation) and a female chorus led by Tina B and Kirsty MacColl.

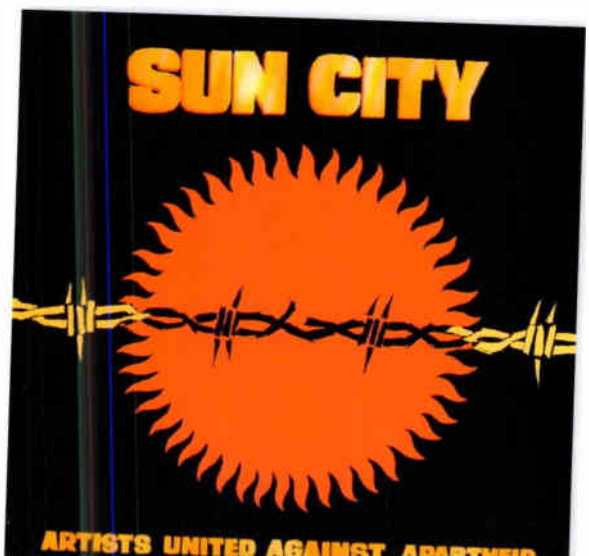
As an old friend of Steve Van Zandt, Bono had been one of the first artists to pledge his support to the "Sun City" single, and was assigned the prestigious final line of the last verse on the version that was ultimately released.

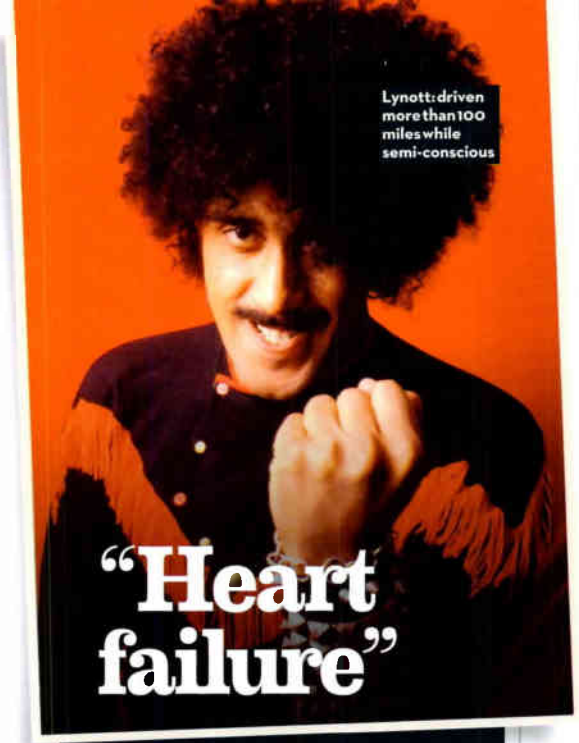
By the October morning that he and engineer Tom Lord-Alge handed the tapes of "Silver And Gold" over to former E-Streeter Van Zandt for a final mix, the *Sun City* LP was on the point of the mastering process.

Three months later, the song still stands as a bold and powerful statement and a moving piece of music. Like Gil Scott-Heron and Peter Gabriel in the late '70s and Jerry Dammers and Steve Van Zandt in the early '80s, Bono Vox has produced one of his most effective and spontaneous songwriting moments from the rage he feels at the system presided over by PW Botha. And, as long as that abhorrent regime and its tacit support lobbies in the west persist, he won't be the last. You can blow out a candle, but you can't blow out a fire.

Adrian Thrills

PETER MAZEL / REX FEATURES




Lynott: driven more than 100 miles while semi-conscious

"Heart failure"

JAN 11 RIP, at 36, Phil Lynott.

THE ROCK WORLD was left numbed last weekend by news that Phil Lynott, founder member of Thin Lizzy and one of the biggest stars of the '70s, had died in circumstance that blended tragedy, pathos and mystery.

Losing an 11-day fight for his life, Lynott died last Saturday evening – with his mother Phyllis, his estranged wife Caroline and her father, TV personality Leslie Crowther, at his bedside – in Salisbury General Infirmary. The hospital gave the cause of death as "heart failure and pneumonia following septicaemia".

Lynott, says a witness, had spent the night of December 24/25 drinking heavily and taking an unspecified drug at his large home in Richmond, Surrey (he had a formidable reputation for booze-guzzling and a string of narcotics convictions). He collapsed on Christmas Day from a mixture of blood poisoning and liver and kidney failure, and it's here that oddities begin.

Instead of being taken to a local hospital, Lynott remained in his home while his wife, contacted at her home in Bath, drove over 100 miles to pick him up. She then sped a further 70 miles to an alcohol and drug abuse centre at East Knoyle, Wiltshire. Accounts of what happened then are sketchy, but it seems that the stricken star was eventually turned away on the grounds that his condition was "medical and not addiction related."

In desperation, Caroline Crowther drove Lynott a further 20 miles to Salisbury General, completing a journey of over 200 miles for her and of over 100 for the apparently semi-conscious Phil Lynott. While there seems little doubt that alcohol and drug abuse will be found to have been major contributory factors to Lynott's death, there will be plenty of other matters for the coroner to investigate at the forthcoming inquest.

"Set for April release"

MM MARCH 22 The Bowie-featuring *Absolute Beginners* film is prepped.

SOUNDTRACK MUSIC FROM *Absolute Beginners* is to be released over the next fortnight in three different album formats.

The first release, on March 24, is a single album/cassette containing 10 songs from the film as well as "significant incidental music". It comprises "Absolute Beginners" by David Bowie, "Killer Blow" by Sade, "Have You Ever Had It Blue?" by The Style Council, "Quiet Life" by Ray Davies, "Va Va Voom" by Gil Evans, "That's Motivation" by Bowie, "Having It All" by Eighth Wonder, "Rodrigo Bay" by Working Week, "Selling Out" by Slim Gaillard and "Riot City" by Jerry Dammers.

A week later, on April 1, Virgin release the entire original film soundtrack in double album/cassette format. It contains all the tracks on the single album plus additional music featured in the film – a total of 22 tracks. Included is music by Smiley Culture, Tenpole Tudor, Clive Langer, Jonas, Laurel Aitken and Ekow Abban as well as a performance of "Volare" by David Bowie.

Finally, and also on April 1, comes an 18-track compact disc which "includes as much music contained on the double album as possible for quality purposes", and lasts 70 minutes.

The movie, directed by Julien Temple and starring David Bowie, Sade, Patsy Kensit and James Fox, is set for an April 3 premiere.

SHRINK RAP!
MICK HUCKNALL

MM MARCH 22 Simply Red's Mick Hucknall on the *Maker* couch.

June 22, 1986: Mick Hucknall fronting Simply Red at the Glastonbury Festival

Sigue Sigue Sputnik

Why have they signed to EMI? Good fucking luck to them – they won't do, but I hope they take the record company to the cleaners. I don't understand what they're doing, but they're about as frightening as a flower show as far as I'm concerned.

James Brown

Different ball game altogether. On the tour, we all kept away from him – we don't like meeting heroes, and he's a hero to me. His group invented funk. Period. Jimmy Nolen invented funk guitar – he is the godfather. How can you knock someone who's made brilliant music for 25 years? He's a giant – brilliant – top man. Forget Elvis, The Beatles – James Brown!

Wogan

He wished us all the best. Very polite. Very polite show. The girl who books the acts is pretty hip – she used to do *The Tube*. They have some good music.

Seaside holidays

I went to Jamaica for 11 days for the New Year. Walked along a white beach just high as a kite – I don't normally smoke, but it's difficult not to over there. Brilliant time.

Paul Morley

I know him from hanging around the Electric Circus and Rafters when there were between 60 and 200 people who all knew each other for maybe a year in the end of 1976/77. He got his job by writing articles about the Buzzcocks, The Fall, Warsaw, and they took him on – the rest of that paper were a group of fucking hippies.

Frantic Elevators

We started writing songs middle of '77. Apparently, we sounded like Captain Beefheart, though I'd never heard any Beefheart at the time. By '79, when we'd lost interest, we just drifted off into a little cranky house in Hulme and played for ourselves for about two-and-a-half years. By the end of Frantic Elevators, we were really playing rhythm and blues – not in a pub-rock sense, but a bit more percussive, a bit weird.

Soul music

I'm tired of the category – if you're going to talk about soul music, then Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding, all that team. The other soul is people who sing with some sort of feeling, create some kind of emotion. It's a difficult pigeonhole. I've said before that I think we're a soul band, but I don't think we're a soul band.

Football

I met Pele – had dinner with him. He's still in great shape – doesn't drink or smoke. He invited us to Brazil; we're going to do some concerts there.

New Order

Still big in Manchester. The bass player's the main one – he's held it together, there's something about him. Albrecht plays some good guitar. They're not as powerful as Joy Division – they had Ian Curtis and he was a force in himself. He was a great lyricist.

John Peel

I listened to him last night and it was fucking torture. I heard a session by some band that just sounded like The Fall's first album. He praises a lot of these alternative independent bands who are a pile of shit. I think he's boring – a waste of radio time. His taste in reggae is terrible – when all that serious rockers stuff was on, between '74–78, he wasn't playing it. We're fanatics about it – Lee Perry, Black Heart, Spear, King Tubby – magnificent. We play that more than anything – dub freaks. He knows his old R'n'B, but I think he's stopped playing things he really likes because he thinks it's his duty to let the "kids" be heard.

The Smiths

Nothing against them. Rather see them in the charts than 90 per cent of what's there. He's interesting. I don't buy his stuff. Is he actually from Manchester? I know he lives in Whalley Range, because I used to go out with a girl who knew him when he was knocking around.

Ireland

I'm half-Irish – I only found out at Christmas. I've had affinities with it and never known why – my regular haunt is this serious Irish pub I go in and play pool. I love Guinness. It's weird, I just fit into the mould.

Critics

Necessary – I don't mind being told about faults. A lot of writers tell me about soul and know nothing about it – they've probably got *Aretha Franklin's Greatest Hits* and *Al Green's Greatest Hits* and think they can write the book of soul. People like Paolo Hewitt – I reckon he knows fuck all about it.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY

June 15, 1986: Joni Mitchell joins the final Conspiracy Of Hope concert at the Giants Stadium in New Jersey

"How do you figure the puzzle out?"

MM JAN 4 Reactivated singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell on apartheid, nuclear war and trying to make sense of it all.

THEY'VE ALL BEEN coming out of the woodwork this past year, the artists who'd never deign to speak to anyone – ole Neil, Dylan a bit, and now the reclusive Joni Mitchell. The recent *Dog Eat Dog* is her 14th album, and it's a mighty long way from her 1968 debut, *Song To A Seagull*.

I didn't even have to go to California, because Joni flew into Europe just before Christmas to face the press. Still, not doing interviews for years does have its advantages. It means you actually have something to say for yourself. About how *Dog Eat Dog* isn't a collection of songs written on the move, for instance.

"When I did *Hejira*, that writing year was spent driving around in the States. I drove across country with a couple of friends of mine to Maine, then to New York, and from New York I drove back home across country by myself, so that year was spent writing against a moving landscape, as was *Blue*. *Blue* was mostly written in Europe, in Greece and France. It has a lot of longing for going back to America.

"*Dog Eat Dog* is a very domestic American album in a certain way, it has a global overview but mainly it was written... married, settled, staying home a lot, watching a lotta television, which puts you in contact with millions of other people watching television. You are the recipient of communications that are going out that a lot of people are picking up."

Dog... finds Mitchell handling some big and disturbing topics alongside her more familiar personal cryptograms. The sound is weighted towards some sort of rock mainstream, unlike *Mingus* or *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*, so in that respect it follows on logically from her last recording, 1982's *Wild Things Run Fast*. Mitchell's musician husband Larry Klein appears as co-producer, writer and musician, while Thomas Dolby also figures prominently among guests with famous names like Don Henley, James Taylor, saxman Wayne Shorter and even actor Rod Steiger, enlisted to enact the role of an ultra-right-wing evangelist on "Tax Free".

The growth of the TV preachers and the Moral Majority with all its hideous hawkishness has alarmed Mitchell more than somewhat. A child of the flower-power years, she still cherishes the American ideal of plurality of thought and deed. She's Canadian herself, of course.

ROBERT ROBERTS / GETTY

"The ideals of the '60s and '70s have a true and clear enemy in this new idea, absolutely focused," she says grimly, exhaling a jet of Camel smoke. She admits to being a chain smoker, and evidently can't kick the habit.

"I guess people, finding that there was an emptiness in their lives, and a lack of community in a certain way, turned to the churches and the more flamboyant of these speakers. Looking for wholesomeness, looking for something that perhaps had been lost in America with the family unit disintegrating and so on, they turned to this idea of the paternal figure at the head of the family, the wife in the kitchen and the children coming up, and temperance.

"This idea seemed to flower and expand. A lotta people stopped drinking, became born-again Christians."

And the perfect father was, of course, Ronald Reagan, who has been at pains to court the evangelists of the new right as publicly as possible.

"A lot of people think Reagan's a nice guy," says Mitchell, wryly. "Neil Young thinks he's a nice guy." She pauses before adding: "He's an actor, y'know." She rocks back in her seat, laughing.

In retrospect, 1985 might be remembered as the year when rock finally faced a few facts about itself. It was no longer radical or unruly, but had become institutionalised and safe. But it still wielded enormous media clout and earning power, factors with huge potential if suitably harnessed.

Joni Mitchell decided rock ought to speak up against the preachers and zealots trying to emasculate it further and subject it to self-righteous censorship of the most obnoxious kind. Hence "Tax Free" – "*Tonight I'm going dancing with the drag queens and the punks/Big beat deliver me from this sanctimonious skunk.*"

On the other hand, the Live Aid and *Sun City* operations left her with some reservations, though she took part in a Canadian Band Aid project. She was asked to appear on the *Sun City* disc, but then discovered that the original lyric went like this: "*Linda Ronstadt, how could you do that?/Rod Stewart, tell me that you didn't do it/ Julio Iglesias, you oughta be ashamed to show your face/Queen and The O'Jays, what you got to say?*"

Linda Ronstadt is an old friend of Mitchell's, part of the whole LA/ Asylum/Geffen crowd, and Joni was damned if she was going to have her pilloried on disc. She declined to take part, and insists Ronstadt's visit to Sun City was undertaken in all innocence on the basis of "art should cross any border". Perhaps Linda's watched the *Sun City* video by now, which ought to have rocked her ivory tower.

Meanwhile, Joni's song "Ethiopia" is designed to put that godforsaken hellhole into some kind of global context. She reckons the world's in a critical ecological state, with the oceans turning toxic, eradicable nuclear pollution everywhere and the rain forests coming down in tons. But how much impact does she expect a song like this to have? Live Aid and *Sun City* seem to have set some wheels in motion, but who does her song really influence?

"Well, there's the appearance of wheels in motion and then there's the actual motion. For instance, Bangladesh [the concert for] appeared to set wheels in motion, right..."

And the money disappeared.

"No it didn't disappear, it went into escrow. It was just released in 1984. It was held all that time – by who, for what, who got the interest I don't know, but the fact was wheels appeared to go into motion but the direct influence on the cause was all an illusion.

"The same with the No Nukes festival. There was a big to-do and a movie and a this and a that, but the funds have a mysterious way of being snatched by government and being disarmed along the way by, if not the government of the country from which they emanate, then the country to which they go. There's a hundred-and-one ways to stop the ball in motion."

"I'm trying to write short stories or small movies, I guess, in the pop song idiom"

So you think this will happen to *Sun City*?

"Well, I don't know. All I know is we just find out these things after the fact. I don't know how much good it does. It certainly seems to elevate people's spirits and they can feel like they're doing something anyway. That in itself is something."

Sceptical or what? Tell it to Bob Geldof and watch his blood boil. Mitchell isn't optimistic about the state of the world. Nuclear disarmament, for instance: "Even if the miracles happened and both sides said, 'Yes, yes, we've been fools all along and we must lay down our arms", what do they do with all the crap that they've got? All of that stuff is toxic. Where are you gonna put it? And supposing they get the bright idea they'll ship it into outer space and blow it up out there. With the forces being what they are out there, it's the same ideas as the oceans – 'Oh, we'll dump it in the ocean, the ocean is so big.' Well, nothing is so big. Even the universe isn't so big that one of those little bangs isn't gonna create some kind of chain reaction out there."

Not much to look forward to, then, though it seems Joni may just be going through a particular phase of doomwatching. She once had a reputation as a kind of professional bleeding heart whose albums were chunks of her personal diary set to music, thinly veiled accounts of her liaisons with various rock'n'roll personalities. As her music grew more complex and idiosyncratic, her lyrics developed a broader reach and sought out less obvious targets.

But, she cautions: "I may go back to bleeding all over the public at any moment" (*laughs*). "The thing that's peculiar is what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to do it in a pop context and apparently that's unusual. It they were short stories they wouldn't be unusual at all, and unless it's a case of Hemingway where they go picking through all of his short stories to link it up to his own life, most of the time they blessedly take a short story at face value as a short story."

So it won't surprise you to learn that Mitchell is considering devoting herself, for 1986, to having a bash at some short stories. She says she's been devouring volumes of other people's lately, by writers including Raymond Carver and the great John Cheever.

"My work is a combination of fiction and autobiography – a lot of the names are the actual names of friends and acquaintances, some are fictionalised and some aren't.

"How do you figure the whole puzzle out? How much of it is fact or autobiography, and how much of it is theatre or fiction? And what difference does it make as long as it's a good piece?

"I'm trying to write short stories or small movies, I guess, in the pop song idiom. Because I have this musical ability, I've decided to use that form to communicate. It creates all kinds of difficulties because it's so much more of a public life than that of a short-story writer. They tend to confuse the artist with the art more in this idiom than any other."

And if writing fiction doesn't work out, she can still go back to her painting, an increasingly important part of her life in any case. She refers to this juggling of creative media as "crop rotation". "David Geffen said to me once that I was the only star he ever met that didn't want to be one," she observed. "The reluctant star, y'know." But it seems to suit her just fine. *Adam Sweeting*

«dog day afternoon»

"We went a bit high-tech"

What's the truth about NEW ORDER? As the band enjoy the success of *Low-Life*, they reveal themselves as an aspiring rock pig, a patriot and two humble, self-effacing musicians. "We're probably worse miming than we are playing," says Stephen Morris.

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 11 —

BY STEPHEN MORRIS'S account, New Order are very shy. Very, very shy, in fact. I'd suggested to Morris, who's the drummer, that New Order often seem aloof, even entirely dismissive of their audiences. They play their songs, stop and walk off. End of story.

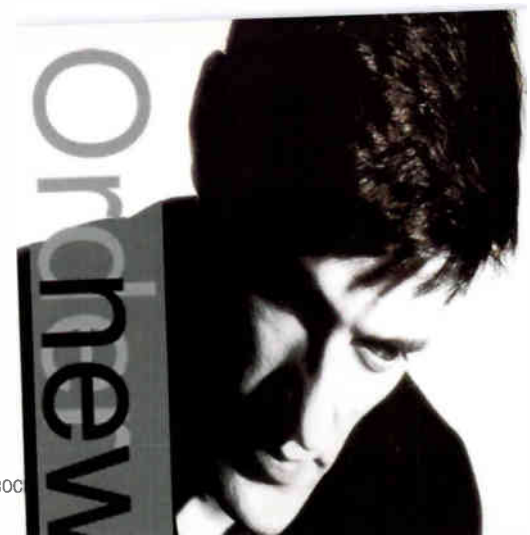
"Er..." said Morris, wincing in the general direction of the floor. "Very, very shy..."

Is that right?

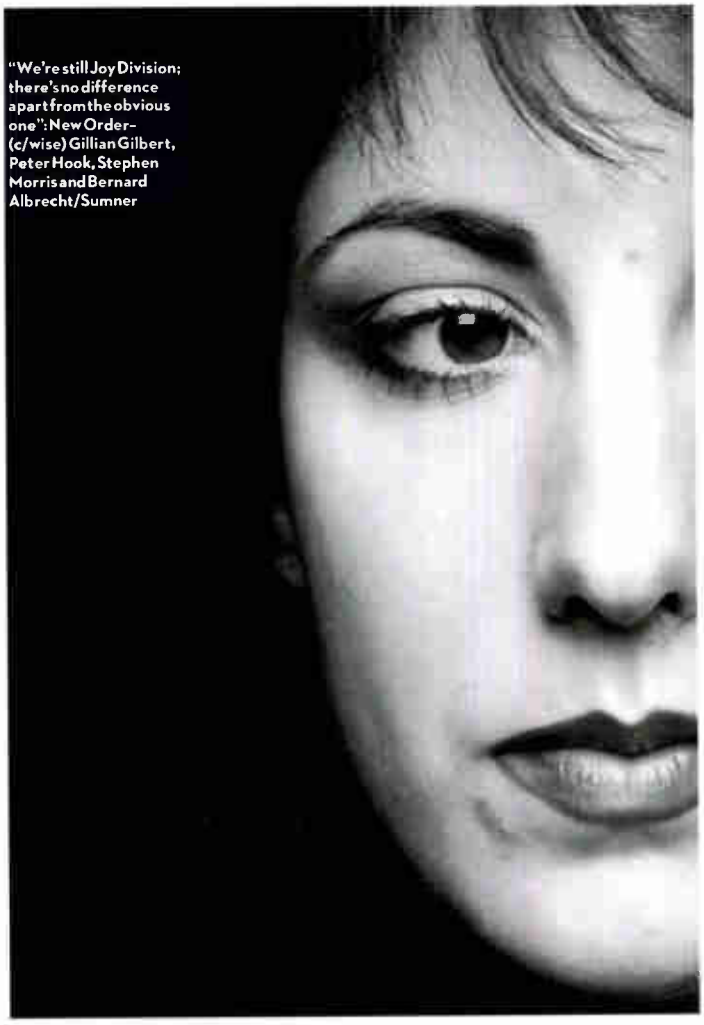
"Certainly is. 'Cos you're just being yourself on stage. It would be quite easy to go, 'Are ya feelin' alright!' and all that, but... Good grief, no! I don't think we've been aloof. You can't really ignore an audience, it's a little bit intimidating, so you tend to find yourself getting annoyed back because you're feeling intimidated."

Listening to New Order's third and finest album, *Low-Life*, it's difficult to believe they could be so easily cowed. Its predecessor, 1983's *Power Corruption And Lies*, was pretty potent stuff too, including as it did "Age Of Consent" and the enduring "Your Silent Face". But *Low-Life* seemed bigger, assured and at ease with itself. Perhaps it had taken New Order this long to find themselves, develop a new forward-looking vision and exorcise the Ghost Of Curtis Past.

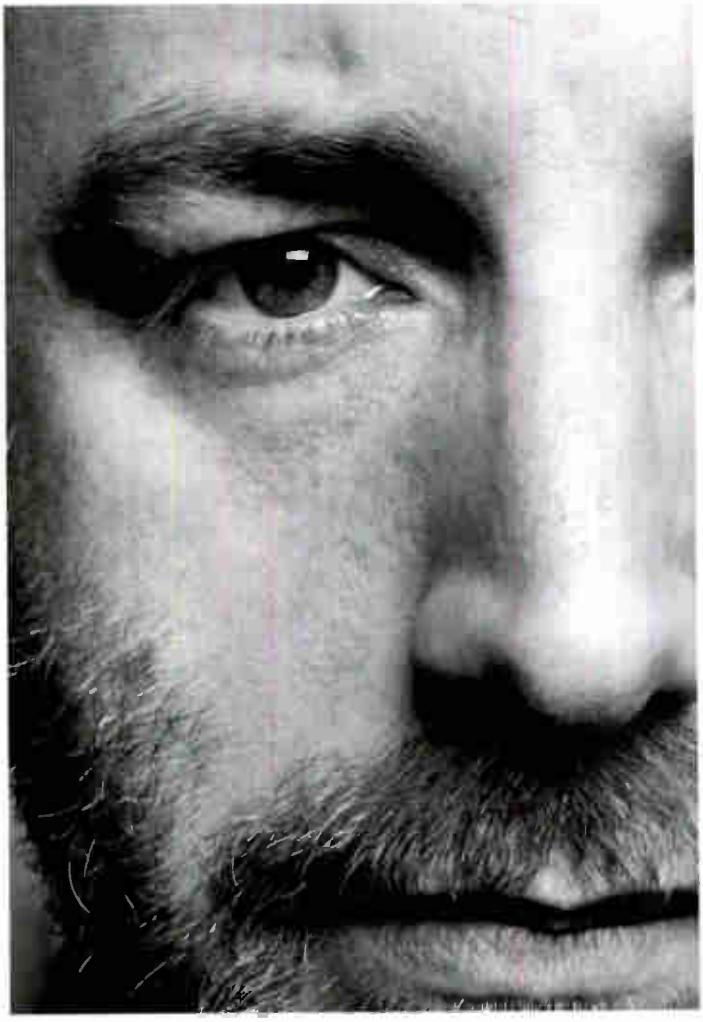
Peter Hook: "It was like the old 'getting back into writing' thing after Joy Division, and finally now »

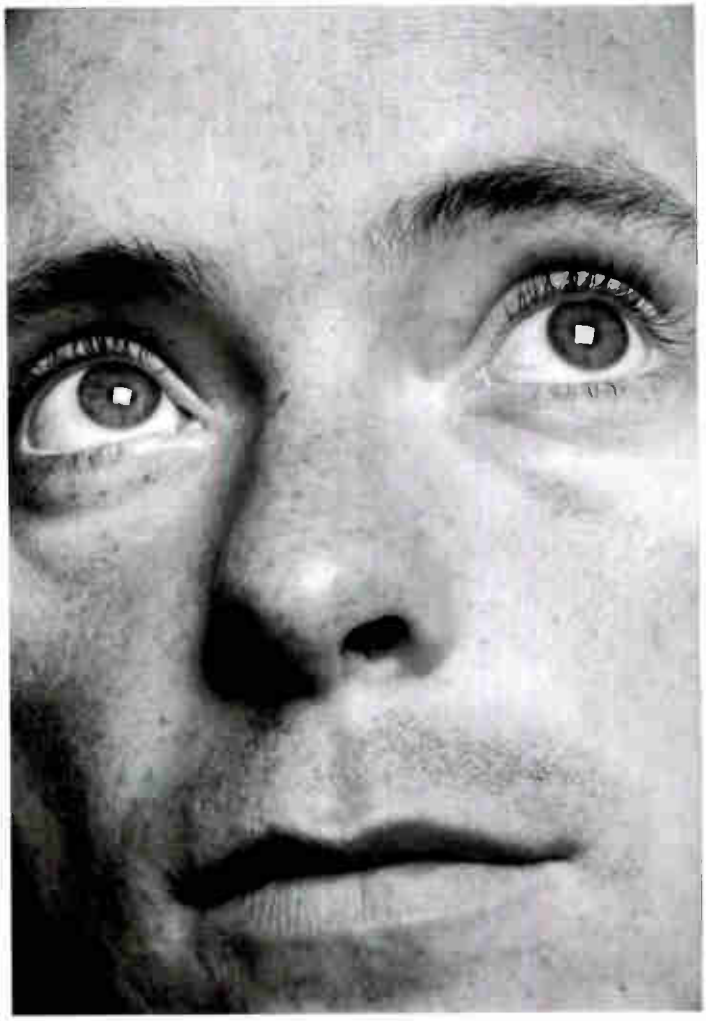


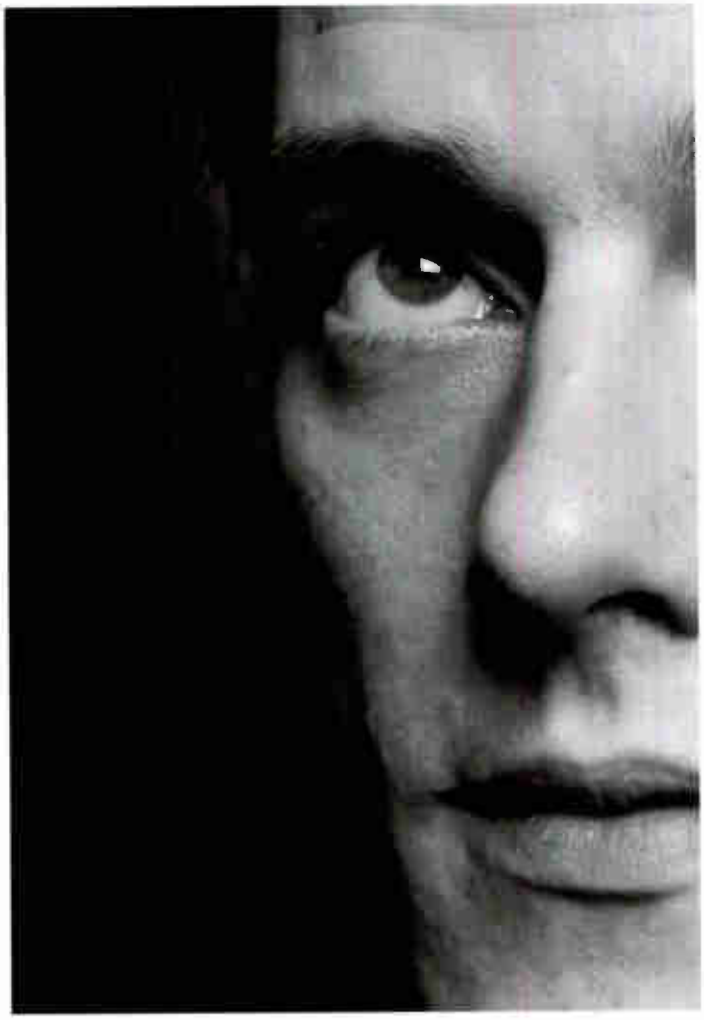
LAWRENCE WATSON



"We're still Joy Division; there's no difference apart from the obvious one": New Order– (c/wise) Gillian Gilbert, Peter Hook, Stephen Morris and Bernard Albrecht/Sumner







Performing "State Of The Nation" and "Broken Promise" on *The Tube* in 1986

we're back to how we were before he died. We're confident about everything that we do now, so that's nice. We feel we can rely on each other, if you like."

So it took a long time to shake off the past?

"Erm... I don't think it took as long as people thought. You still get people who say, 'Ah, New Order are shit, Joy Division are the best.' But we're still Joy Division, there's no difference apart from the obvious one."

One chilly December night, New Order were on home turf at The Haçienda in Manchester, playing two sets for the paying punters and having a couple of numbers dropped into the *Whistle Test* live.

We arrived for the soundcheck. Bernard Albrecht picked up a guitar, plugged it in and began to chug out some of his trademark throaty chords. Morris pottered about at his drumkit, firing off the occasional burst of drum machine, adjusting cymbals, tightening knobs and checking his banks of gadgets. The ghostly Gillian fingered a synthesizer impassively. Manager Rob Gretton, a kind of hippy Jack Hargreaves, looked on with his hands in his pockets.

It was the arrival of Peter Hook that abruptly set the chemistry in motion. Hook, unshaven, gingery-blond hair tied back and flopping over the collar of his heavy black leather biker's jacket, is part Monster Of Rock, part Ian Botham when he has an Australian in his sights. He wears his bass low-slung, treating it more like a trail bike than a musical instrument.

The sound is something else. According to Bunnymen bassist Les Pattinson, Hook plugs his bass through every device available, and it hits you like a falling log, a soaring, supercharged cudgel of sound. It seems to push back the walls and raise the ceiling, giving everybody else room to do whatever they like, secure in the knowledge that a sound like that couldn't possibly let you down.

Hook unloosed a few volleys of notes, then the group dropped in behind his zooming riff for a new song called "As It Is And When It Was". A powerful and spacious piece, it bears more than a passing resemblance to "Love Will Tear Us Apart". Hook grinned evilly to himself. Some *Whistle Test* personnel paused to listen, dressed, of course, in the obligatory media-punk style. New Order don't even seem to look at each other while they play, but they must be listening. Suddenly they've become shockingly good, full of confidence and guts.

"I never noticed that until somebody pointed it out to me, funnily enough," said Hook after the second set. "Our American agent it was – she said, 'Play that 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' one.' I thought, 'Fuckin' 'ell, yeah, it is! Wild!' That was one we played on the *Whistle Test*, it's a really good song. Just shows you, you can rip yourself off, even if you do it unconsciously."

Better than having Trevor Horn doing it for you. Hook laughed expansively. He's not easy to feel at ease with, though talkative enough. Even his gestures of relaxation seem exaggerated – he answers some questions too quietly, he leans back a little too far in his chair, eyes you with a mocking grin. He makes you aware you're under scrutiny.

"People think we're very awkward because we won't do things. I'm not gonna do your photographs because I don't feel like it. I don't mind talking. I feel like talking because I've been in the studio every night for two weeks, but I just don't feel like having me picture took.

"I don't do anything unless I want to do it. I do it sometimes for an easy life, when you're too fucked to argue about it or something. But you always regret it in the morning."

That seems like a fairly macho attitude to life.

"Could be, mmmm," Hook agreed readily. "You're probably right. But that might be down to the fact that I can get away with it, because of the way Factory works. If any of us didn't want to do something, the others wouldn't expect him to do it. Because, y'know, what's the point? There's no point in playing a certain song if someone really doesn't want to do it."

The Press

BERNARD: "WE HAD a report from WOMAD in your newspaper which gave us a really shitey review. I bet you don't print this, but she was actually completely out of her box drunk, blacked out when we were playing. And she gave us a really bad review. She wasn't even there, which I found particularly annoying. She said we never did an encore. I don't like people who lie."

Peter: "It's interesting to talk to people who are interested in what you're doing, whether they think you're shit or whether they think you're great. You can learn something. That *Sounds* guy recently – he was a total turd. He hadn't listened to the LP and he was interviewing us about it, which I thought was absolutely disgusting for a rock weekly which is supposed to be informing people about what's happening in modern music.

"He was saying to me, 'The songs on *Low-Life* are a lot more optimistic than the ones on *Power Corruption And Lies*, why's that?' I said, 'Well, I don't think they are. There's a lot of really up songs on *Power*.... That's not true.' And he said, 'Well, the lyrics are more optimistic.' I said, 'I don't think so, I don't think that's true.' Then he said, 'Well, I haven't actually heard it, the subeditor told me to ask you that.'

"That was where the thing about the fight came in, which was fuckin' bullshit anyway. If we'd had a fight I'd have ripped his fuckin' head off, he was a wimp. But he sort of steered it round as if to say he offered me out! The whole thing was pathetic. It came across in the interview, it was

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a pathetic interview. They've asked us to do another one and I'm not surprised, 'cos he just got nothing out of it.

"He was a complete dickhead, he wasn't doing his job. It comes down to respect, doesn't it? You seem alright to talk to, you don't seem too bad. Quite interesting, y'know what I mean?" You're too kind. "But he wasn't interesting – he just did it very badly, so he got treated badly. What do you expect? Ask someone jokey questions and you're gonna get jokey answers."

New Order have perhaps been dogged by their reluctance to explain themselves, or to give anybody much idea of what they're really like. With the exception of Hook, though, they seem genuinely introverted, even painfully so. They and the Bunnymen are mutual fans, not necessarily to the point of loving every song the other has recorded, but because of a sense that they share the same attitude. Les Pattinson came over to Manchester for the Haçienda appearance, on the eve of the Bunnymen's British tour. Hook's rock'n'roll star stage gyrations amuse him greatly, presumably in contrast to his own onstage passivity.

The Haçienda

BERNARD: "WE'VE GOT money invested in it. The original idea was that it was a loose club where you could go and hear loose music, not stiff music, and also you didn't have to get dressed up to go. Anyone could come here, anyone at all."

Q: So it's anti *The Face* type of attitude?

Bernard: "Yeah, but people like that can come as well. Originally we intended it to be a bit more of a venue, but it's turned out to be more of a disco than a venue. It was also just to establish a scene in Manchester, maybe like in the early days of Factory when we 'ad a club which is now called the Russell Club, which was then called The Factory, in Moss Side. But that got a bit rough, people gettin' beat up outside and mugged."

Peter: "The idea of The Haçienda was a club that wasn't accompanied by any bullshit, where you could get in dressed as you like, which Manchester at the time didn't have. It didn't have a club where you could go out. I never used to fuckin' get in anywhere, except if there was a gig, then they'd let you in. The Haçienda was the first club where you could get in dressed as you liked. And I had to fuckin' open it!

"Now in Manchester all the clubs are like that, The Haçienda has had a really good effect on Manchester as a whole. Again, I think it's important to show that you're willing to put something back in. We work really hard on this place. I do the sound system meself, the PA for the disco and things like that. It's good 'cos you can learn to do something that's different, as opposed to just knowing about being in a group. You're learning how a club runs. You gather a wealth of experience."

In the bowels of The Haçienda, New Order sat quietly with various friends and associates. The tables were covered with beer bottles and Rizla packets. Stephen Morris and Gillian were perched next to each other on a faded sofa, talking so quietly that they might have been conversing telepathically. Albrecht wandered over and said hello, looking quizzical and wide-eyed. "Anyone seen Hooky?" he asked.

"He went home," said Gillian.

"Hope he's here soon," said Bernard.

Two minutes later, the door thumped open and Hook strode in, scarved and leathered. "Evening all," he said cheerfully. There was a sense of tension lifting. They were on stage in 15 minutes, and TV doesn't like to be kept waiting.

Factory supremo Tony Wilson flitted about busily, a brusque, fast-talking figure who likes to do everything at once. No doubt Paul Morley learned a thing or two from Wilson back in his Manchester days, like how to be too bloody clever for your own good. Without New Order, Factory would probably bite the dust. As it is, the company remains a great Mancunian curiosity, a quirky throwback to the arty days of post-punk somehow threading its way through the revisionist mid-'80s.

Life During Wartime

WOULD YOU EVER move away from Manchester, Bernard?

"Not at the moment. I did think of joining up when the Falklands conflict was on. That was the nearest thing."

Seriously?

"Patriot, mate. I'm a patriot."

You'd really have gone?

"If it wasn't for the group or me family, yeah."

That's a very unfashionable thing to say.

"Yeah, I know it is, but I don't believe in bullying, I don't believe in aggression. I think Argentina was aggressive. It's real unfashionable, but they shouldn't have done what they did."

Have you got friends in the army?

"Yeah. Me cousin David's in the army. He's in Germany."

So does all this somehow relate to "Love Vigilantes", then [a tale of a soldier returning from war]?

"Yeah, I suppose it does in a way. I believe basically that war's wrong, fighting's wrong, but defending yourself isn't wrong. If someone hit me, I'd hit 'em back, I think most people would. Personal opinion. I mean, no one condemned the British for fighting the Germans in World War Two, and it was right what they did. It was fuckin' right.

"But suddenly it's not right if the British stand up for their own territory in the Falklands. It's easy to sit on your arse in a warm, comfortable living room and take one side or another, but the basic fact is that Argentina was aggressive and we weren't. They took the first initiative."

What about the argument that Mrs Thatcher went to war in the Falklands purely for political gain?

"Oh, I think what Mrs Thatcher did was really bad. It's really bad that she's come out of it with credit. She should have been kicked out of government because of it. It should never have happened, part of it was her fault, but nevertheless Argentina shouldn't have invaded a neutral or foreign country. It's like someone walking into your house and saying, 'This is my house now.'

"I mean, I don't condone things like Vietnam. I ain't a fookin' military maniac. But if someone invades your country it's not fair, is it? People said the Falklands was over land, but it wasn't, it was about all the British people who lived there. They didn't want the Argentinians there."

It might have been over oil, too. There's oil down there.

"Yeah, that's the perfect cynical viewpoint to jump to."

War's a pretty cynical thing. Seeing the Falklands veterans with melted faces is nauseating. Shouldn't we be past all that now?

"I think we should be past it. War is disgusting, it's really disgusting. But you've got to defend yourself. You're always right if you don't take the first action. It's the people who take the first action who disgust me. I've never attacked anyone in my life."

And as for "Love Vigilantes"...

"It's very tongue-in-cheek, it's like a rebel song but it's very tongue-in-cheek. It's kinda laughing at rednecks. From what I said you may construe it to mean that I'm a redneck. I am not a redneck, I assure you, and 'Love Vigilantes' is like laughing at rednecks. The more ridiculous my lyrics are, the less serious the song is."

> "The more ridiculous my lyrics are, the less serious the song is"

Roots

BERNARD: "ORIGINALLY WE come from punk roots, which I liked because it didn't exclude anyone. It didn't matter what you looked like, whether you were fat or thin or ugly or beautiful. It was really down-to-earth, really down-to-earth. It was very anti grown-ups at the time, but I think it was really good. We still believe in it and this is our way of showing that we still believe in it. We don't believe in snobbery, to put it simply. Or elitism. We've been accused of being elitist, which we're not."

New Order performed with transcendent power that night. They'd completed a string of British dates only a couple of weeks before, but already they'd completely rearranged the set and shoved in several impressive new songs. The Haçienda couldn't have been designed to make watching a group more uncomfortable. Balconies, stairs and the slightly raised dancing area were crammed and impassable. Ribs and girders block your view from several angles.

But you could still feel the sheer torque they were generating on stage. The veteran "Temptation" has »

never sounded better, a euphoric gallop of chattering electronics whipped by thrashing chords. "Shame Of The Nation", or possibly "Shame Of A Nation", will probably be the next single, and is as terse a song as the group have written.

The newest songs seem immense, giant structures of sound encompassing long climactic instrumental passages. Albrecht doesn't have to worry too much about singing, and hunches twistedly over his guitar as his hands scrabble spastically across the strings. Hook does the splits, Iron Maiden style, over his bass. Gillian is improbably still, busy channelling New Order's new technology into strong, glittering patterns, while Morris batters away at the back among his kit and his machinery.

The sense of aimlessness they sometimes used to display has gone, and if the songs are getting longer now it's because the group have learned how to manipulate atmosphere.

Audiences

PETER: "I DON'T feel any compulsion to pander to them, I don't see the point. 'Cos most of them are real cunts – they shout at yer, they scream at yer, they spit at yer, they throw bottles at yer. I mean, a lot of them aren't, it's like typecasting your audience, but the point is the ones who just stand there and listen you never get to meet, do yer? The fucking loudmouths who are throwing and spitting and screaming 'Warsaw' and fucking 'Transmission' – it's really boring.

"Some cunt tonight shouted 'Warsaw'. Must think they're being really clever. Dickheads. The world's full of people, unfortunately."

"There might be another Sex Pistols," said Peter Hook whimsically later that night. "We might be the next Pistols. What a nice thought."

You might be the next Genesis.

Hook chortled. "That's what a lot of people say we are. The next Mike Oldfield. The next Mike Oldfields. But it's a rotten business. I'm glad I'm out of it, to be honest. I watch *Top Of The Pops* and I feel very far removed. The funny thing was I had real good fun doing *Top Of The Pops*. It was a great day, really enjoyable, and even though it didn't sound that great because we played live, to me that was one of the biggest achievements.

"I watch bands like Orchestral Manoeuvres that started the same time we did and were on Factory. They could have done exactly the same as we did, but they took the easy way out and signed to Dindisc and got a huge advance, and they were coming over and apologising to us for miming. Which I thought was really funny. Everyone did – Kajagoogoo and Human League, apologising to you for miming. Saying, 'We wanted to play live but we thought it was a bit tricky.' We must be striking something really deep within 'em to annoy 'em."

Stephen Morris remembers that day like this.

"We played live not really for any strong sense of commitment, like Keep Music Live or anything like that – it was just that we'd feel complete and utter prats miming. We're probably worse miming than we are playing, so... we just don't want to mime."

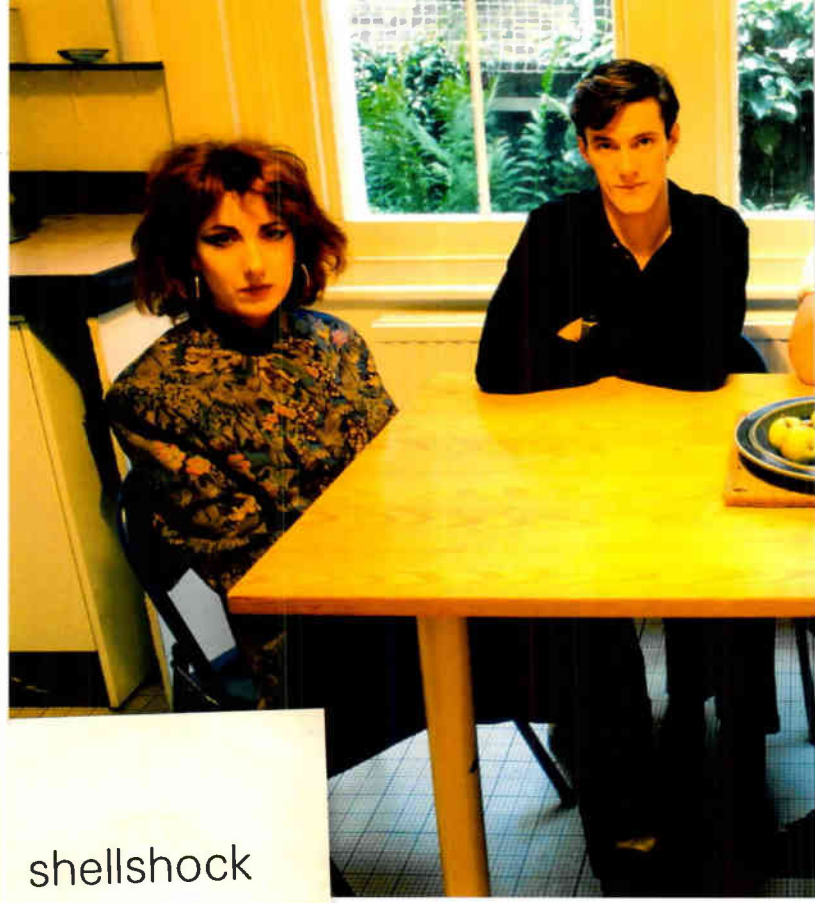
In Morris's determinedly low-key version of events, New Order proceed almost inadvertently forwards, avoiding humiliation and self-abasement at all costs. They've avoided putting their name to the assorted good causes available to today's rock star, though they've done an Aids benefit recently.

"That's right," muttered Morris. "We haven't really. There's things that are obviously good causes and deserve attention, but we're not sort of fucking crusading about anything, really. 'Convictions cause convicts.' We try to be open-minded, really."

The "Nazi" slurs flung at both New Order and Factory wouldn't have anything to do with this heads-down policy, I suppose?

"That just got to be a joke after a while, because everybody knew it wasn't true," Morris responded. "We just used to get really, really fed up with it. It's alright when it's being directed at you, but when it's being directed at everybody on Factory, y'know, you feel a bit sick."

Why has the group got so good lately?



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"We've just been working hard, I suppose. In fact, it seems like longer than recently. It seems like forever."

New Order reinvest a substantial amount of their income in new equipment, which sounds great but takes a bit of getting to know. "It drives me piggin' mad actually," said Stephen. "It takes up considerably more time than playing something or making something up. The time it takes is unbelievable really. You find yourself getting a bit more musical because you've got to communicate with a machine. It's got to speak a language, and the people who make the machines decided the accepted notation of music was the way they'd do it. You found yourself being forced to get a bit more musical, so I suppose we got a bit better.

"Fortunately we've got some reliable stuff now, it doesn't break down so much. But when it breaks down, God! One could have kittens. Sequencers and stuff you can do a lot with, but they become... Y'know, everything that you listen to has got one, which is a shame, but people are funny like that. Everybody sort of leaps in on things like punk and whatever, and all of a sudden there's loads of things that are all very nearly the same."

You can get a glimpse of an earlier New Order in their *Taras Shevchenko* video, shot at the Ukrainian National Home in New York in 1981 (it's released on Factory's video offshoot, Ikon). The performances are rough but forceful, primitive stuff in comparison to the post-*Low-Life* New Order.

"I quite liked that video," observed Morris, "because by the time it came out it was a historical document, it was years gone by. I thought it was quite good really, but I think the Joy Division one was better because it's got a bit more crudity about it. Some of the Super 8 footage is really good because it's tacky, because it's there, and it's not planned."

There was one question I had to ask. Why did Ian Curtis always look fuzzy or totally invisible in photos of Joy Division?

"He actually looked like that, strange to say," said Morris, unperturbed. "I can't say I've noticed. I can't stand looking at photographs. I don't really like looking at videos. It's like when you hear your voice recorded on tape, you go, 'That's not me!' and videos are the same thing only worse. Oh God, no! I find it a bit embarrassing."

The band's changed a lot though, even since that Ukrainian Home video?

"Yeah. We went a bit high-tech. It's quite quaint, 'cos in that video all that stuff was hand-made, it's all held together with a piece of string, literally.

> "Every single word, I believe it whether it's out of tune or not"

September 1986: achieving balance during a shoot for *The Face* magazine

"There was nothing so complicated as a polyphonic sequencer or anything like that, it was cottage-industry stuff. Not even a Drumatix [drum machine], it was before all that. So when the Drumatix came in, my God! You'd give your right arm for a Drumatix.

"We had gadgets when we were Joy Division, they were just slightly lower-budget gadgets. We used to have a little synthesizer and a little Woolworths organ which always came in handy for things, and the favourite of all was the Shin-ei fuzz pedal so beloved of The Jesus And Mary Chain – yes, you're onto a winner there! A classic. It had 'Shin-Ei Fuzz' written on it, it was great."

Politics

PETER: "I THINK the only politics I'm interested in are Factory politics. 'Cos that's what's nearest and dearest to my heart, if you like. I'm more interested in what's going on around me, that I can affect, than some fucking... I've seen all this socialism bullshit that Paul Weller goes on about..."

Q: Why is it bullshit?

Peter: "Because it doesn't do it to the people around him. You go on his tour and it's just run like a normal rock'n'roll tour – rock'n'roll excess, everything that's fucking bad about it. And how he can fucking spout on about socialism and things like that and then he doesn't do anything about the things he can change in the way that he runs his business...

"I mean, Paul Weller is a really big business, y'know what I mean, and he's got the power just with what he does to affect a lot of people's lives. Like what you meant about The Haçienda here. But he doesn't. It's like charity should start at home. You tell other people what to do and don't practise it yourself – that's really bad."

Bernard Albrecht sipped his tea, then let his shoulders sag and sighed heavily. "God, I'm so tired," he said weakly. "This will be the strangest interview you've ever done," he'd promised as he led the way through the labyrinthine basement of The Haçienda to a neon-lit corridor about four feet wide. We sat in chairs facing each other. It was like an interrogation scene from *Midnight Express*.

"It's quiet here," Albrecht explained. He looked about 14 years old, and spoke in a fragile whisper. "Bernie's funny," said Mac once. "He just sits and looks at yer, like he's a little kid or something."

I didn't dare speak too loud in case he dropped dead in front of me. The group had been holed up in the studio for a fortnight, working with American producer John Robie on some new material, including a song for a movie called *Pretty In Pink*. Robie, a regular collaborator with Arthur Baker, wrote the music for "Planet Rock" and Freeez's "IOU".

He was also responsible for the thundering 12-inch remix of "Sub-Culture", a masterpiece according to some (me) but evidently a bone of contention within the group. Robie had cracked the whip over Bernard's vocal, and also added some belting female singers to beef up the choruses. Bloody good idea, because Albrecht's voice, although apparently frail in the appropriate dosage, has often been the weak link in the New Order equation.

"John gives you discipline, and then I can put my own expression onto that discipline, whereas what I've been doing in the past is no discipline, just expression, complete expression. If it's out of tune, a lot of people won't listen to it. I do admit that a lot of what I sing is out of tune, but every single word, every syllable that I sing, I believe it whether it's out of tune or not.

"He's shown me that what you can do with vocals is stress a point. You don't have to shout, you can use a melody to stress a point. He's just shown me another way of doing the same thing, really."

New Order maintain a delicate balance between the cool precision of their machines, Albrecht's erratic vocals and the occasional raggedness of their playing. Is it a case of deliberately pitting human error against microchip perfection?

Albrecht chuckled. "Not deliberately. Errr... it's a difficult one, that. Don't know, I just do it. But I'm a bit of a lazy bastard, so anything that's difficult I'd rather..."

Do you practise the guitar?

"Never, no. I never sit and practise anything. I hate it. But whether that's a good thing or a bad thing is open to debate. But I think us as a group and John as a producer suffer from the same thing, which is that we don't actually get recognised enough, but the people that rip us off get recognised more than we do. I don't like to name names, but we have been ripped off, and the people who ripped us off are more successful than us."

But you're pretty successful anyway, surely? Does it really worry you that much?

"I don't worry about that at all, but if you've got a chance to put it right you should put it right."

Is tenacity a Mancunian characteristic?

"It's everybody's characteristic. You've got to float on top of the water, not underneath it."

When the group aren't working, Albrecht claims to do as little as possible for long periods of time.

"I'm a complete and utter lazy bastard, and if we're not recording I don't do anything, I just think a lot, lie in bed and think a lot."

Do you read books?

"I'm really bad at reading, 'cos I read really slowly – I think very slowly, actually. But two years ago I decided that television was complete and utter rubbish, garbage, and that I should read more. So for the past two years I've been trying to read, and it takes me about six months to read a book. That's not a joke, it actually does. I'm very slow, I don't know why.

"The last full book I read was *The White Hotel* by that guy D M Thomas, which is really good but it's really disturbing. It's about a case study of Freud's. And I've been trying to read a book about Van Gogh called *Lust For Life*. I just feel like if someone's remained through history, if they're still well known after years and years, then you should know about them. And I just wanted to know about him, even though it's a novel. It's based on his life, but it isn't all factual."

You say you're not elitist, but it looks like it sometimes. I remember a show at Brixton Academy where New Order treated the audience with utter contempt.

"No, I was contemptuous of ourselves, actually. It was the first time we'd played in, like... These are things nobody ever knows, but it was the first time we'd played in three or four months. It was a really bad gig, we thought we played really badly. I just felt ashamed. I felt mad at myself, I didn't feel mad at the audience. When I get mad, people construe it as being aloof and snotty, but I'm not. I get mad at myself a lot."

A perfectionist?

"No, I just believe you should put your heart into something if you're gonna do it. But partly it was my fault for having the wrong attitude. When you do a gig, you should do it so that you enjoy the music when you're playing, enough so that you can play the music well. If you enjoy what you're doing, it's easy."

Adam Sweeting •

STEVE SPELLER / ALAMY

January 18, 1986: The Replacements on *Saturday Night Live* – (l–r) Tommy Stinson, Chris Mars, Paul Westerberg and Bob Stinson

ALAN SINGER / GETTY

"We're not geniuses"

Erratic, eclectic, THE REPLACEMENTS are a great new rock'n'roll band. Will the world learn of their genius before their own nature derails them? "We have a different way of going about things," says PAUL WESTERBERG. "We're the only band worth a shit that doesn't care what's gonna happen."

— NME JANUARY 11 —

"THEY TRY TO teach you everything they think you should know and none of the things you want to know. There wasn't a class on rock'n'roll, and that was the only thing I loved and cared about, so I just didn't study. Chris is an artist, so he took art. And as for Bob and Tommy, they're interested in… nothin'.

"I can honestly say there was nothin' I wanted to know. The only thing that interested me was history – Indians, things like that. I don't know why. I feel sorry as far as I can't spell very well. I feel embarrassed when, like, we had to go to Canada and had to fill out some forms, and I was sweating – the guy had to fill them out for me. I can't spell a word of more than one syllable correctly. It's things like that I wish I'd listened to a little. I'm a borderline illiterate…"

Paul Westerberg is far from stupid. He is, however, of that breed almost entirely extinct (in Britain, at least) outside the heavy metal fortress: Paul Westerberg is a solid-gold easy-action through-and-through rocker. He is entirely without side; nor does his band, The Replacements, disclose any extra-musical trapdoors to admit or debar ideological/stylistic elites. Their lack of non-rock ideology is almost an ideology in itself.

"I frankly don't care about it. I don't mean to come on like I don't care about anything but myself, but I'm a very simple person. I don't know. It doesn't interest me. I hate to sound so one-dimensional, but playin' rock'n'roll and bein' happy with my life at home with my girlfriend, that's what I care about. I don't care about the state of the world an' stuff.

"I'm not blind to injustice, but I don't know what to do about it and I'm not some self-righteous person that's going to go out and try to change the world. I don't like to put the band in the position that they have to stand for this or that; I don't buy that shit. To me, that makes rock'n'roll somethin' that it shouldn't be.

"Reagan? I like him. A president, to me, should look good. I like the fact that he dyes his hair and wears makeup. Seriously! He's not supposed to have a brain, he's just supposed to look good an' shit. I'd rather have an actor as president than a politician. I like Nixon too! Ha ha! I don't know anythin' about politics and I know he was dishonest, but, y'know, there's how many dishonest people in the music business? Those are the ones that get ahead. I'm not saying that's good, but… aaah, fuck it, I'd better shut up."

Better had, Paul. For what it's worth, that kind of hairy armpit talk goes down like a bucket of cold sick with the well-tempered *NME* reader. And while I applaud his honesty, I can only wring my hands that Paul Westerberg is so damned narrow. But then why should the artists one admires be as hip, aware and bleeding-heart right-on as oneself? Just ask Mark E Smith. Then again, maybe better not.

So forget Red Wedge and Farm Aid for now. Because this is, as the purists among you constantly point out, *New MUSICAL Express*, and if you can show me a more rootin' tootin' new musical combo burning the boards anywhere on the planet right now, I'll kiss your arse.

Left of the dial

CALIFORNIA IS AN earthly paradise, especially right now when back home Blighty resounds with the clang of balls dropping off brass monkeys. One small cloud, though, sullies an otherwise clear blue sky: try as I might, all I can pick up on the radio is K-RAP, K-BLAND, K-ZZZZZ… Wasn't it the Sunshine State that brought us Wolfman Jack? But now Jefferson Starship drools the waves, and the nearest I get to *American Graffiti* is a chance hearing of "White Rabbit" on an oldies station. Like, cosmic coincidence, maaan…

Into this vacuum step The Replacements. Because if there's one thing better than the hallowed rock'n'roll radio whose disappearance was so eloquently mourned by The Ramones, then it's got to be the living, breathing rebellious jukebox that is The Replacements.

Covers? They got 'em. They got covers like you wouldn't believe. They got covers that'll cause you to rethink entirely your index of cool, that'll have you ransacking the unhippest deposit boxes in your memory banks. You will be convinced that Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love" and "Heartbreaker", when properly executed with swagger and aplomb, can be the holiest moments in one's earthly existence; that Alice Cooper's "I'm Eighteen", Bachman Turner Overdrive's "Takin' Care Of Business" and "Black Diamond" by Kiss are masterpieces of the grunt'n'grapple game; that Big Star's "September Gurls" is even better than they say; that The Jackson Five's "I'll Be There" can move mountains when accompanied by HM guitar; that if there's a more boundlessly beautiful song than Sham 69's "Borstal Breakout", it's "Yummy Yummy" ("*yummy I've got love in my tummy*") by The 1910 Fruitgum Company.

As for The Beatles' "Nowhere Man", the Stones' "Last Time", Hank Williams' "Hey, Good Lookin", T Rex's "20th Century Boy" and "The Marching Song Of The United States Marines", their wondrousness goes without saying.

All these and more, plus their own considerable catalogue, are performed by The Replacements with a frenzied, contagious love that far outstrips mere reverence. Not for them note perfection, still less the knowing winks and ironic tweaks of those clever fellows given to theories of kitsch and post-modernist cycles. The Replacements are not taking the piss. Nor are they signposting their stance with clues to link them to a familiar strand of the past. No, those songs are favourites, the ones that turned them on and made them play in the first place: honest influences…

"My deepest influences are The Beatles and the Stones, then The Supremes and The Temptations," croaks Paul Westerberg, his

Floored individual: Paul Westerberg (lying down) of The 'Mats (an alternative monicker adopted after some joker referred to the band as "The Placemats")

GETTY

Midwestern drawl abraded by a steady flow of America's alcohol-free but mildly corrosive beer and frequent draws on a Jed Clampett-style amber-stemmed pipe. "Rod Stewart was probably the first thing I started listening to on my own – '71, I was 11. *Never A Dull Moment* was the first LP I bought, and my favourite record of all time is *A Nod's As Good As A Wink*. I like the variety – there's the dumb rockers and some real pretty ballads too."

Catchiness is the essence of The Replacements' own toons. And if you hear echoes of half-remembered goldies in Paul's intensely gorgeous melodies, it's not so much he's self-consciously tipping his hat to an influence as he's failing to cover his tracks. Yet his toons are not pastiches or parodies: Paul writes from the gut with the vocabulary he absorbed when most impressionable.

"That was one thing I've always liked about Cheap Trick: Rick Nielsen was smart enough to know a good riff is a good riff, and it's there for the taking. Why the hell not? No one's going to come up with a cool new riff: they're all right there – it's how many different things you can draw from them and put together. If you steal from everything, nobody can put a finger on you. It'll sound awful familiar, but... we're not geniuses, we're rock'n'roll fans!

"I'm not prolific at all, and writing songs is a little more difficult now than it used to be. I don't like to repeat myself and I don't like to write stupid things. I like to write things that appeal to each member of the band, and that's difficult: if it isn't a rocker Bob doesn't like it, and if it isn't tuneful Chris doesn't like it. Tommy likes things that are simple, and I like things that are honest and emotional. It's not easy."

For Paul Westerberg, necessity is the mother of invention. Honesty goes without saying; or, at least, Paul's voice is so plaintively red-raw and ragged that no song sounds less than heartfelt. As for tunefulness, simplicity and rockismo, all three trip hand in hand through The Replacements' repertoire.

Indeed, they make a refreshing change from most pop musicians, who, should they happen to come up with a good tune, will convey it in kid gloves to the laciest, silkiest arrangement possible, the better to set off its fragile appeal. Other musicians less fortunately blessed, like, say, Simple Minds, will place their microscopic fragments of tune beneath a giant perspex pyramid of sound so as to magnify its meagre dimensions into a grand illusion.

Others, less gifted still, take their numbing lack of any kind of tune at all and give it loads anyway in the hope that no one will notice.

But The Replacements write melodies so thrillsome that whole continents of uplift and wracked passion hang on every golden chord change. And they take them on stage or into the recording studio and proceed to beat out seven shades of Shinola. Fucking magic.

> "If you steal from everything, no one can put a finger on you"

Tonight's entertainment – hippie rectum

THE ABOVE MOTTO is to be found among a whole selection scrawled on the ceiling of The Replacements' tour van, a pigsty on wheels that has farted down nearly every interstate in America. Right now we're stopping off for beer-call in a deli on Rockaway Beach (but of course!) a few miles outside San Francisco on our way to take photographs at Devil's Slide. The ideal place to meet the band, *n'est-ce pas*?

Paul we know. He is genuinely – as distinct from artfully – scruffy. By night the band is fuelled on crank, beer 'n' blow; in daylight hours Paul plays at George Burns with the help of an evil-smelling stogie wedged in his gob like a smouldering turd. At 26 he comes over twice as old; more like a wry, rumbling veteran who digs the company of youngsters.

About the same age, Bob Stinson plays lead guitar to Paul's rhythm.

"Bob is an excellent rock guitar player but a terrible musician," laughs Paul. "He doesn't know the difference between a minor and a major chord."

"Bob is the goofy one, a real goofball," adds younger brother Tommy Stinson with glee. "He has moments when he's totally off his rocker! He's the Keith Moon of the group."

Actually, Bob is the Duane Doberman of the group, the butt of all their jokes. Big, genial, slightly reserved, he's also the only Replacement to have got embroiled in the kind of footloose scenarios sketched in the band's early songs – street gangs, vandalism, minor arson, the usual trouble.

His bass-playing brother Tommy, 19, has been in the group since its inception six years ago; The Replacement are his gang. A lippy lad with foxy good looks, he's starting to tone down the drunken-brat lifestyle just when most kids are getting into its swing.

Drummer Chris Mars is off the sauce altogether. A quiet, saintly guy apparently much devoted to his sci-fi-flavoured art, he suffers most keenly the burdens of stardom, of cult proportions though it yet be. He and Paul are like temperaments.

"Us growing up, we were kind of loners," reminisces Paul, "and we're living out our juvenile delinquent period now. Whereas when we were younger – speaking for myself and probably Chris – we were sort of introverted and shit, and would have liked to have been in a gang but were always sort of outsiders and never really belonged with any group of people."

The Replacements grew up in downtown Minneapolis, one of Minnesota's adjacent so-called Twin Cities, the other being St Paul. Heavily settled by folk of Scandinavian and German stock, Minneapolis boasts a tradition of thrift, hard work, plain speaking, and currently two of the most exciting rock groups in the world. Hüsker Dü is the other. Together, Hüsker Dü and The Replacements present two aspects of the Twin Cities: respectively, po-faced and shit-faced. Rivals in their fans' eyes if not their own, each apparently regards the other with mild disapproval centring on the degree of seriousness deemed appropriate for a rock'n'roll band.

"They're real serious and we're real high," sneers Tommy. "They would get real disgusted with us when we would get shit-faced drunk and play and not even care, whereas they would, like, get real gung-ho and make their statement."

Some of this friction may stem from the fact that Peter Jesperson, The Replacements' manager and 33 per cent partner in their former record company Twin/Tone, Minneapolis's main indie label, signed the band in '81 on the strength of Paul's songs round about the same time he rejected Hüsker Dü's formative offerings on the grounds that they were just a tuneless thrash. Ironically, they now find themselves labelmates: Hüsker Dü on WEA, The Replacements on its Seymour Stein-run subsidiary, Sire.

Thus it is that The 'Mats' latest LP, *Tim*, released in November, is freely available in Britain. With its predecessor, 1984's *Let It Be* (no relation), the '80s has spawned its most exciting, funny and varied rock'n'roll albums – essential purchases (*Let It Be* is released in the UK on Zippo Records). Less consistently excellent, though still worth acquiring if you can stand the import prices, are The Replacements' first three LPs: *Sorry, Ma, Forgot To Take Out The Trash* ('81), *Stink* ('82), and *Hootenanny* ('83).

Produced by one-time Ramones drummer Tommy Erdélyi, *Tim* boasts a more layered, polished sound than that of previous albums, a small concession to the mighty dollar. For The Replacements are wary of the rock-star image-building process to the point of paranoia. For example, despite record company pressure, they categorically will not be making a promotional video, not even a live one, because that would take the edge off the first-time thrill of the real thing. Nor will they happily play anywhere larger than the size of place you can project to the back of without looking a grotesque wally to the people up at the front.

Another inherent limit on The Replacements' buck-potential is their self-deprecation. Check out their LP titles. Check out the history of their own name: they used to be The Impediments, for crying out loud, until a drunken performance at a church hall gig for recovering alcoholics made the name mud all over town. So they had to, ahem, replace it. Incredible but true.

"You can lump us in with Hüsker Dü and REM [whose Peter Buck has long championed The 'Mats, as has John Doe of X], but really there's not a whole lotta bands you can lump us in with if you get to know us," reckons Paul. "We have definitely a different way of going about things.

"We are the only band worth a shit that doesn't really care what's gonna happen. We're just as much afraid of gettin' big as we are of floppin'. If we went down the toilet tomorrow, I don't think we'd be as sad as 99 per cent of the bands in the world."

"That's why we're such a good band," beams Tommy. *Mat Snow* •

Depeche Mode: (c/wise from top left) Dave Gahan, Alan Wilder, Andy Fletcher and Martin Gore

ALBUMS REVIEW 1986

ALBUMS

Depeche Mode
Black Celebration MUTE

The same old song. That Depeche Mode are willing to worm their way out of their lucrative niche as mega-cuddlies is encouraging, even if they've been at it so long they've fashioned a career from sweet abrasion. Damn sure they know they'll never swap their teddy bear image for chart terrorism, but the effort has become the sole fuel to Martin Gore's fixations.

It's depressing, though, that in their own small struggle for personal and artistic dignity, Depeche have only managed to trade in one set of cliches for another – white for black, bright for bitter, tunes for twisted chants.

Black Celebration finds Depeche even more over-anxious than they were on the depressing *Some Great Reward* to shock for the sake of it, pussycats desperate to appear perverted as an escape from the superficiality of teen stardom. "Dressed In Black" is just "Master And Servant" revisited, an adolescent masturbatory fantasy. Similarly, "Fly On The Windscreen" attempts to evoke the claustrophobic swamp inertia of Mute labelmate Nick Cave's "Wings Off Flies".

These songs tell us, time and again, that they're desensitised to love, that the only release open from spiritual malaise is a momentary tactile passion, a lunging, groping lust.

More saddening still is "New Dress", an unbridled attack on press hypocrisy which, in its humourless juxtaposition of headlines ("*Famine horror, millions die*") against its refrain ("*Princess Di is wearing a new dress*") recalls nothing more than a secondary school poem.

As always, it's difficult to discern whether Martin Gore's clumsy lyrical truisms are intent on promoting his over-apparent desire to assume a sinister dimension, or whether he's honestly concerned for his subject matter. Are the Depeche of "A Question Of Time" revelling in the scenario of under-age sexploitation as an exercise in biting the hand that feeds, or are they genuinely dismayed at the inevitable moral decay of this rotting nation?

Then again, it's precisely Gore's naively logical lyrical equation, wedded to the established Depeche linear musical mode, that occasionally adds up to something successfully whole, something that incorporates optimism. The title track's a throbbing metallic purging of the daily grind, "Stripped" is pleasingly minimal, if mannered, and there's a wonderful hope in the appalling "New Dress": "*You can't change the world/But you can change the facts/And when you change the facts/You change points of view/If you change points of view/You may change a vote/And when you change a vote/You may change the world.*"

But it's when Depeche are being unconsciously throwaway, when they relax their straining against their reputation, that they attain the sublime. "A Question Of Lust" is gorgeous, an Almondesque torch vocal mounting a simple electronic coda worthy of The Human league. Mostly, though, *Black Celebration* is Depeche fucking with their formula, and the real shock is the insight it provides into the troubled psyche of Martin Gore, a lad struggling to grow up in public and, for all his opportunities, finding only sleaze and filth to feed off. They'd have it sickening – Gore a willing victim desiring the symptoms he purports to despise.

Silly boys. *Steve Sutherland MM Mar 15*

Swans Greed K.422

What is the sound of a Swan in love?

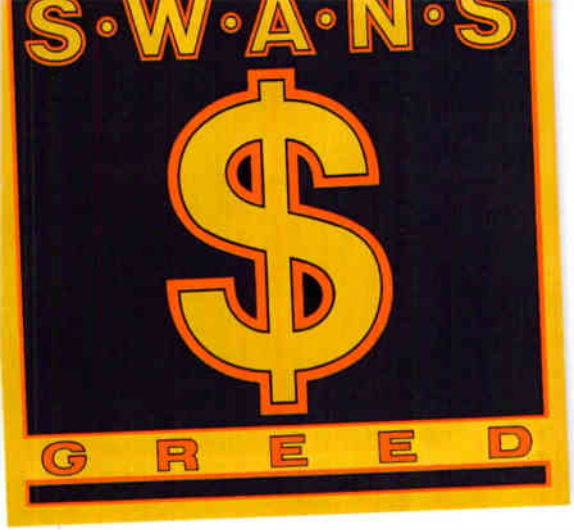
This is unmistakably an album of love songs, even if its words are pared to the bone, its essence distilled to the most potent, and potentially explosive, concentrate. This is pure love. Something like Pure War.

It could be the sound of a factory floor filled with the relentless clanging of a thousand heavy, metal cash registers. The Swans, after all – by which I mean not the band, but the crew of flesh-pot pickers, masochists and terminal addicts of desire that inhabit this LP – are stricken with an ugly obsession with the money-making machine. They crave it like only the deprived can, although the craving makes them feel dirty and disgusted.

But money is time – time bought to get away from the slog and back to the grind. The grind, or the screw, for the Swans is the arena where the brutality and humiliation of the slog can be fantasised, perverted or simply fucked into oblivion. "*Flesh,*" they remind us with a leer, "*is easy to get when you work for a living.*"

Whatever the sound is, it doesn't resemble the sound of a conventional word; it's more likely to sound like an expiring grunt fed through some technological mincing machine. Words are few and far between in the Swans' way – phrases are repeated over and over with the slightest variation. Take "Fool", where Michael Gira croons in a deathly tone over a mordant piano, "*I lie to myself/I'll lie down here/I'll lie down beside you.*" In print the words look stark to the form of banality, but just as in minimal music, where the interest lies in the imagined

FREDERIC MEYLAN / GETTY



(not the actual) melodies, in the context of a song that's structured with classical precision, imagined meanings and tangible emotions leak between the words. Eventually the effect is almost unbearably heart-rending. After the brutality of *Cop*, what's so striking about *Greed* is the emotional range.

It could be the frustrated howl of the would-be attacker or the simper of the self-defining victim. After the "*You should be raped/You should be violated*" chorus of anguished cursing on "Time Is Money", "Anything For You" investigates the Swan as victim: "*Force yourself on me/I know where my money comes from.*" To anyone with half a brain it's obvious that this is not some cheap glorification of sex crimes, but a painful penetration of deeper themes of ownership, delivered in real tones of black and blue.

Whatever the sound of the Swan in love, it is surprisingly compelling. It has been commented that every description of the Swans makes the idea of listening to them appear profoundly unappealing. In fact, on the evidence of *Greed* and the forthcoming "Holy Money" EP, the Swans grow more and more practiced in the art of seduction; having stripped their sound down to pure, raw energy, they are now in the process of moulding a new flesh around the exposed nerves.

Greed is the sound of the Swans in love, and the most appealing sound, to these ears, for many months. I want more.

Don Watson, NME Mar 29

The Bangles Different Light CBS

Reactions to The Bangles' recent live shows in soaraway deep-frozen Britain hinged upon their '60s-ness, revivalism quotient and curiosity value (if any). True, the gals play pop in its traditional sense, a blend of California sun and garage scratch. But despite their erratic performances and chosen limitations, they make pretty good records.

"Manic Monday" didn't seem to be anything special initially, but after a few radio plays it lodges neatly between the ears, thanks mostly to a hook of impeccable simplicity and Susanna Hoffs' coy lead vocal.

It's one of four non-originals here. Another is Alex Chilton's timeless "September Gurls", whose lilting melody and shimmering chords are rendered faithfully by The Bangles despite a vaguely off-colour guitar break in the middle.

Better by far is "If She Knew What She Wants", which kicks off the second side. A song of majestic structure, it's made irresistible by gale-force four-part harmonies and a production job (by a certain David Kahne) which will one day grow into a full-scale Wall Of Sound. Watch this space.

Different Light doesn't contain anything quite as overwhelming as "Dover Beach" from its predecessor *All Over The Place*, and occasionally falls into a cliched girl-pop rut. "Walking Down Your Street" followed by "Walk Like An Egyptian" not only makes you sick of the word "*walk*", but also adds up to an overdose of frugalong teen-beat.

Still, the group have zeroed in on their greatest collective asset - to wit, their armoury of voices. They all sing well enough to take a lead vocal or two, and the permutations available to the foursome are tantalising. In "Angels Don't Fall In Love", for instance, lead guitarist Vicki Peterson steps out front while the others blend and swirl behind her, either dropping in single counterpoints or providing massed backup. "Return Post" builds gradually from solo Vicki to massed guitars and multiple Bangles harmonising frantically.

It doesn't have to be this way, as demonstrated by the desolate "Following" where Michael Steel sings solo, but The Bangles' massed tonsils allow them to get away with patchy material and make the best of the stronger songs. Now, if only they could generate some of the unhinged creativity of The Beach Boys or The Byrds... but I guess that's just California dreaming.

Adam Sweeting, MM Mar 8

Talk Talk: (l-r) Lee Harris, Mark Hollis and Paul Webb

SINGLES REVIEW 1986

SINGLES

Talk Talk Life's What You Make It EMI

Talk Talk used to be a poxy synth band with grandiose ambitions, and though this, their first record for ages, is choked in a stranglehold of production intricacy, the underlying song seems better than their burbling twaddle of old. Sophisticated but not too clever-dick, the song doesn't boast a great deal of personality but it's one of those that insinuates its way onto the airwaves and makes its perpetrators very rich indeed. Probably worth keeping an eye on. *MM Jan 11*

Dire Straits Walk Of Life PHONOGRAM

It's hard to dislike Dire Straits, because you always end up admitting that Knopfler is a brilliant songwriter even if the songs aren't the kind that find their way into your own home. Besides, he's taken the piss out of Paula Yates on live television, which shows his vision and perspicacity in other ways too. "Walk Of Life" boasts a good country swing, great hokey guitar and that intangible air of mellowness that to an untrained (or uninterested) ear makes all their songs sound the same. Attractive, if not one of their classics. *MM Jan 11*

PiL Rise VIRGIN

Dead man makes record shock. Good one, too. Lydon, perhaps the laziest-ever pop star, has teamed up with avant-shocktrooper Bill Laswell (producer and co-writer) to generate this thumping, mesmerising stretch of luxurious noise. "*They put a hot wire to my head because of the things I did and said,*" caterwauls the oik, but you can ignore him and listen to the winning chime of 12-string guitar, the shudder of synthetic cellos, the heaving wallop of percussion and the *Volga Boatmen* chorusing appears, based on a brief and poignant modal phrase. So what if it's taken him three years to write one song? *MM Jan 25*

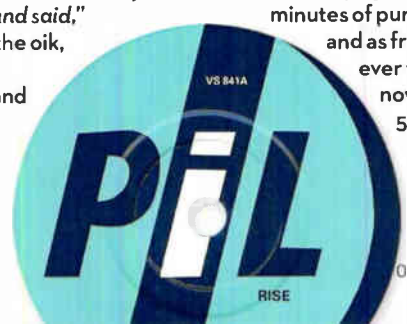
Malcolm McLaren Duck Rock Cheer CHARISMA

Most hated single of the week. Why does Malcolm McLaren: (1) Release the same single over and over again (this time reworked in cahoots with Trevor Horn)? (2) Presume upon an international gullibility that seems to have a blind spot where he's concerned?; (3) Always get away with it?

This is a remix of every McLaren single ever, and in the name of freedom, justice and liberty I implore you not to buy it. Can't wait to see the video, though. *MM, Jan 11*

Sam Cooke Wonderful World RCA

First James Brown, then Sinatra, and now Uncle Sam to complete the remarkable resurrection of the original crucial three. The reasoning behind this re-release is fairly mercenary, having more to do with the Levi Strauss company than any genuine attempt to bring Sam Cooke back to the masses, but such dodgy tactics fade into insignificance as soon as those first few gorgeous lines come strolling out of the speakers. No frills, no extended raps, just three minutes of pure genius and as fresh now as it ever was. I shall now pull on my 501s and go for a bath to cool off. *MM Mar 15*



KEES TABAK

"Definitely trouble-makers"

"I disagree wholly with the Echo And The Bunnymen school of songwriting," says Robert Forster from THE GO-BETWEENS, whose lyrical tunes are now a thriving critical concern. "Rolling seas and massive horizons. It's absolute garbage."

— NME FEBRUARY 8 —

IN THE NEXT few weeks, Beggars Banquet will release The Go-Betweens' fourth LP, *Liberty Belle And The Black Diamond Express*. Like *Send Me A Lullaby*, *Before Hollywood* and *Spring Hill Fair* before it, it will have a double "l" somewhere in its title. Remember this, it's important.

"Bobby Womack himself told me that I am a soulman and that, as far as modern music's concerned, there's only three soulmen left: himself, me and Prince... Prince came to Brisbane, and took the colours, the moves, his whole act, from me. It's true! He's seen my moves! It's true!!!"

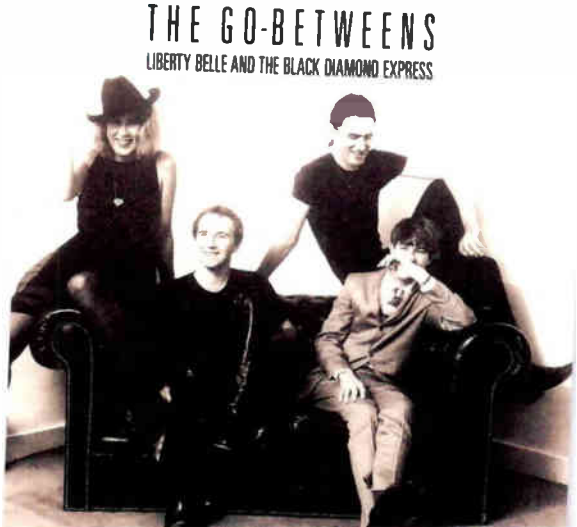
Robert Forster has a deluxe line in flights of fancy, but they're the wisdom of Solomon compared to the craziness that surround the band he's in.

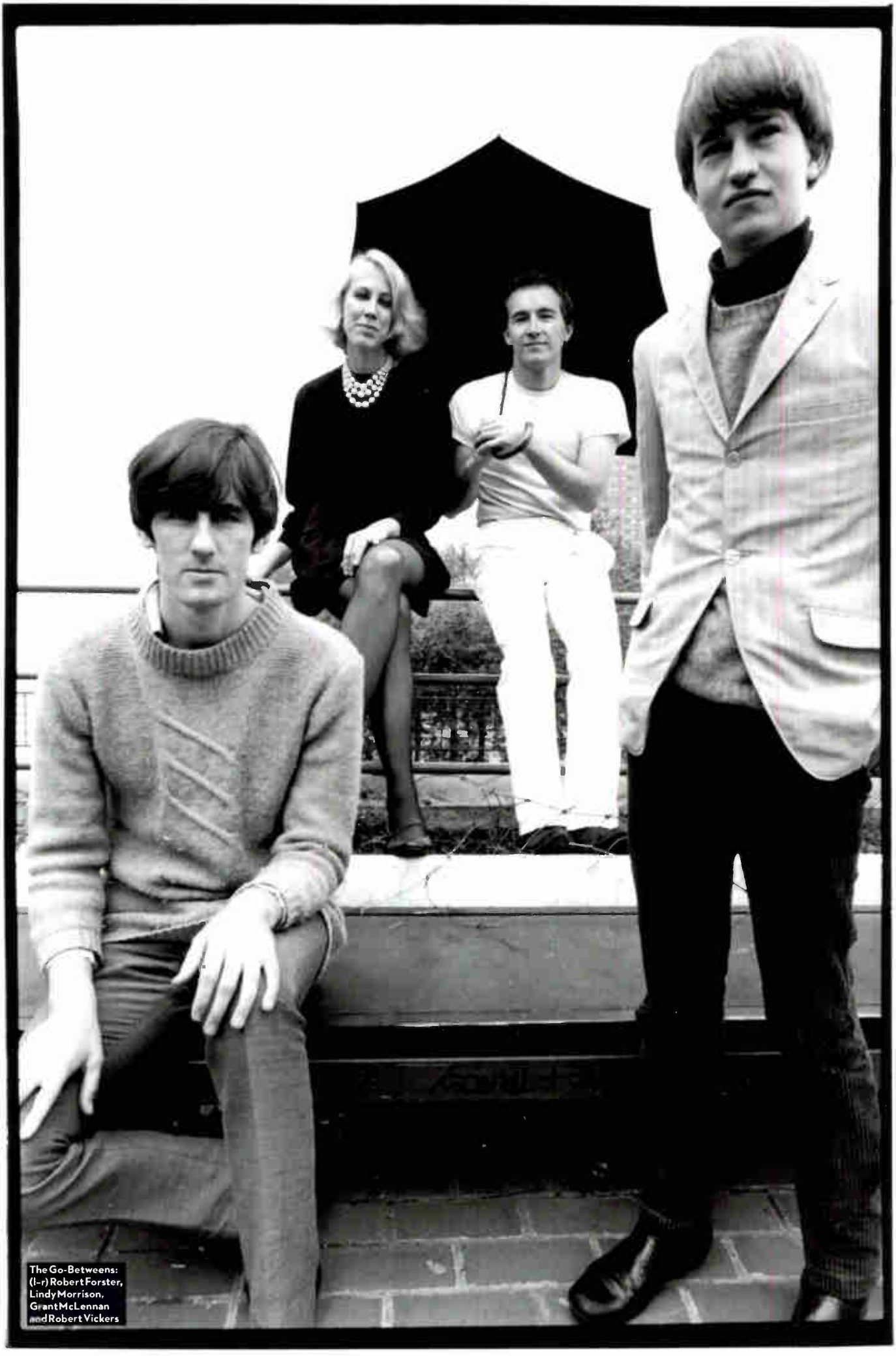
The Go-Betweens, employing only such time-crusted tools as the four-piece rock band and the English language, have already ensnared a fearsomely fanatical following with their increasingly fine live shows, have released two of the '80s great albums and, with *Liberty Belle...*, are poised to do the hat-trick.

Yet, until the eleventh-hour-and-then-some intervention of Beggars Banquet, they had no outlet for their LP outside of their native Australia. They've been forced back to that country to restock their spectacularly empty coffers playing detested urban booze-barns and have, when they ought to be as familiar as any non-chart act around, to be written about like newcomers, complete unknowns.

The triple-strength strangeness of their standing – or rather their lack of it – means that Forster can announce during sets, without a hint of irony, that The Go-Betweens are "the greatest band in the world". It means that some of *NME*'s clearest minds can dub them The Most Over-rated Group In Existence. And it means that I can state – call it paradox, call it journalistic licence, call it bloody nonsense – that while »

BLEDDYN BUTCHER





The Go-Betweens: (l–r) Robert Forster, Lindy Morrison, Grant McLennan and Robert Vickers

there are many "better" bands on this planet, The Go-Betweens are undoubtedly the best.

But just how they've fashioned glints of gold from elements that habitually yield sludge, and how they've failed to translate their precious mettle, critical favour and cult fervour into something tangible (kudos and credibility are fine, but Sainsbury's want coin of the realm) are questions that need answering, mysteries that demand solution!

And soon, because time is getting short and nothing lasts forever. Film-star faces wrinkle, empires fall, and inspiration fiercely flares then fades, so behind the writhing contradictions of The Go-Betweens' present predicament, behind every note they play and every word they utter, can be heard a faint but remorseless sound.

It's a ticking, a countdown. Maybe to ecstasy, maybe oblivion…

FIVE VAGUE NOTIONS – some positive, some otherwise – attempting to account for the abiding riddle of The Go-Betweens' existence: the sight of a brilliant band with the arse out of its trousers.

Their appeal – vague notion Number One – is something to do with them as An Idea. In your dreams, you've imagined a band that's relentlessly intelligent and literate yet which knows, deep in its marrow, that at that mysterious place where Rock becomes Magic, no amount of cleverness, of craft, of assiduous brainwork, can compensate for a lack of those mercurial intangibles we, struggling for grip, tag "feel", "instinct", whatever.

And in your dreams, you've conjured a band born and grown beyond the temperature-controlled grooming of the major labels or the rod-rigid house rules of Britain's indie scene, a band with roots that aren't the handiwork of a corporate hairdresser, and a story that didn't begin in the Filofax fantasies of some executive. A group.

"I've always preferred groups with a story behind them," muses Forster, "like The Beatles between 1956 and when they broke big. So many groups today are formed by answering advertisements. The bands that just pop out of A&R men's heads just don't ring true.

"We're a band, a group, and nowadays that's terribly rare and important. Look, sometimes we're together in the street, the four of us. I see people on the other pavement staring, asking themselves, 'God, what is that?' They answer themselves, 'That is a group!' That gives you this sense of…power."

He's right, too. The magnetic pull of The Go-Betweens is also something to do with them physically. In their unlikely mishmash of beanpole and short-arse, blonde and brunette, androgen and oestrogen, occurs an alchemy that renders them irresistibly bizarre, bizarrely irresistible. Where the carefully, callously sculpted likes of Go West, Eighth Wonder, Wham! or Five Star aim for perfection through balance, The Go-Betweens thrive on their perfect imbalance.

They know it, too. Grant McLennan – who shares with self-appointed last soul musketeer Forster the writing, singing and guitar wrestling bits of The G-B's sonic soup – revels in it: "We absolutely look like no other band in the history of the universe. On some nights we're the ugliest band in the world, on others we belong in Madame Tussauds, total princesses and princes. Don't we look great? Can you possibly fail to remember us?"

Two vague notions down, another (positive) one to go. The 'Tweens' fineness is also something – a lot – to do with the beautiful alloy of noises, tunes, words, melodies and harmonies they risk, songs that positively shame the withered, lethargic and self-satisfied video playground ditties with which they compete. The bedrock sponge of this rich cake is formed by simultaneously reverent and forward-looking assimilations of classic (no-duds-need-apply) guitar bands; the icing is dolloped generously on by Forster and McLennan's obvious passion for and mastery of rock's most abused servant, the English language.

"Words interest me very much," begins McLennan. "I really want to communicate the visions that I have. Not visions in the sense of Verlaine or Rimbaud – the poets, you understand, rather than the musician or the muscly film psychopath – but real ideas and images, nonetheless."

"And I," continues the sprawling assemblage of limbs and slightly scowling intensity that is Robert Forster, "like real speech patterns, conversation, dialogue. I disagree wholly with the Echo And The Bunnymen school of songwriting – y'know, rolling seas and massive horizons. That whole fantastic world stuff does nothing for me, it's absolute garbage."

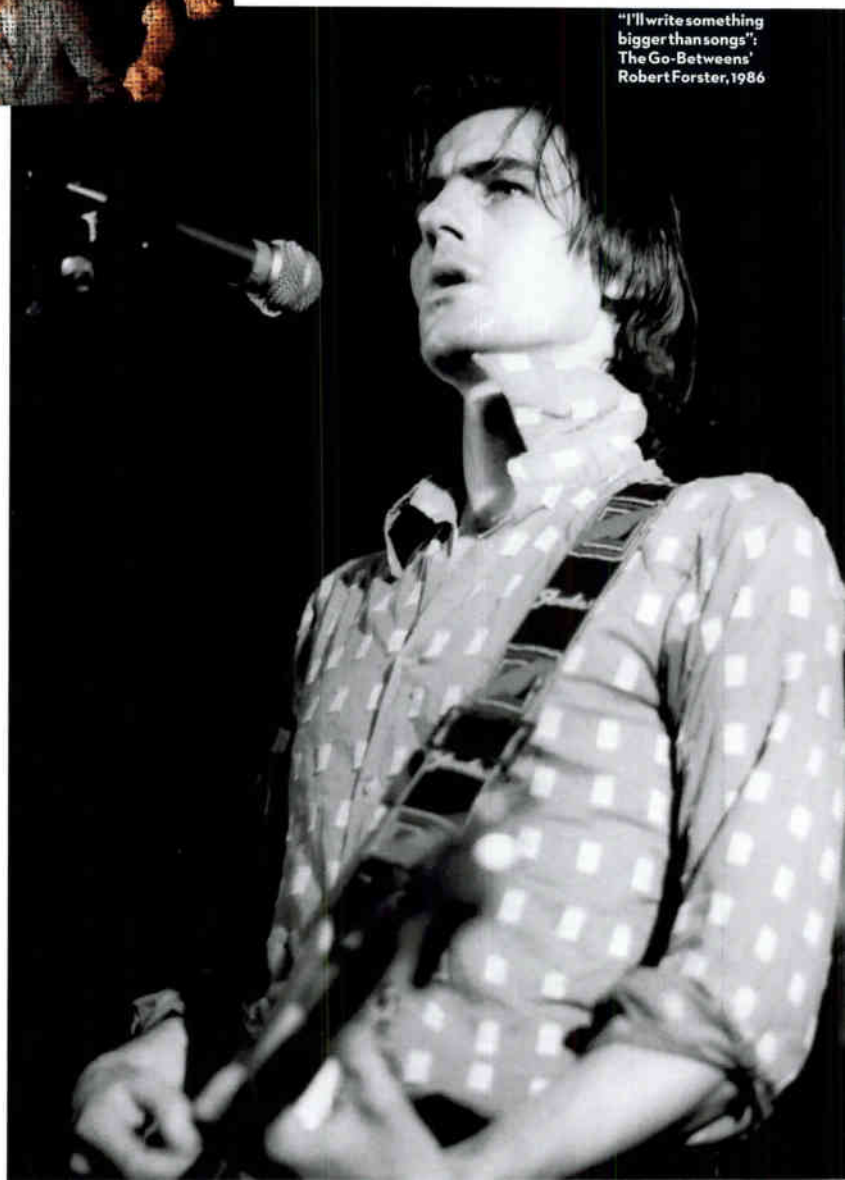
"Unlike so many of the new kings and queens in town," Grant sums up, "we believe in quality. That's the only reason that our not being huge annoys me – so much of the other stuff is shit!"

Those, then, are the pluses; what about the reasons for The Go-Betweens' continued wheel spin on the cloying mud of cultdom? They talk endlessly about the vagaries of public opinion, the inevitable triumph of "natural justice", and plain ole bad luck (they were abroad the good ship Elektra UK before it hit that iceberg recently and, unlike Simply Red, didn't rate a place in the lifeboats), but there's a need for another line of thought, a little mirror-gazing.

Y'see, the fact is that this is an aggressively quirky and wilful ensemble, always setting themselves apparently pointless little goals. They've tried, for instance, to cut each LP in a different country, and then there's the business with the double "l's" (continue remembering them, they're still important). What to their faithful might appear loveable eccentricity is pure Essence Of Peptic Ulcer to Mr Record Company Moneybags.

THE FAB FOUR, four pieces of jigsaw, stable for the last three years.

Robert Forster is tall, dark and, he's the first to assure you, handsome. He writes, he plays, he dances, he sings – more like cajoles – and he projects himself from a stage like a wig-flipped preacher, a Speakers' Corner firebrand, a marionette witch-doctor. Forster looks like he was designed by a committee of rock fanatics asked to produce the



"I'll write something bigger than songs": The Go-Betweens' Robert Forster, 1986

BLEDDYN BUTCHER

perfect frontman, and talks like he knows they did a brilliant job.

Grant McLennan is blond, less obviously intense, and less prone to Mad Talk. Much has already been made of his isolated childhood in an outback sheep station, but while a sense of distance does inform his writing, an encyclopaedic knowledge of and voracious appetite for old mother rock is the most noticeably recurrent theme in his conversation. People paint him from the pot marked "poet", but his chatter is always more likely to be filled with Dylan (Bob) than Dylan Thomas, with Pete Shelley rather than Percy B, and The Easybeats more than the West Coast Beats. The day of our meeting, McLennan wore cowboy boots of the profoundest red imaginable.

Lindy Morrison is The Go-Betweens' drummer. Maybe she was born with it, or maybe it was acquired doing what's traditionally a man's job in the most macho non-Latin societies on Earth, but Lindy has a notoriously hard head. A braver soul than me would tell you that she drinks, swears and threatens too much (no, not for a woman, for anyone!). For years, she was Robert Forster's lover, 'til last year the relationship altered. They occupied different floors on the same house, meeting occasionally on the stairs for what she describes as "a glamorous fuck". And now?... Who knows? A hazarded guess would place the new love of her life as the aerosol-applied leather trousers she creakingly sported at the band's recent au revoir show in London.

And Robert Vickers, like all bass players, erm, plays the bass. Floppily fringed and stuffed into a suit too small for even his tiny frame, he looks less a prospective rock star than a refugee from your local fourth form. During gigs, you find yourself constantly checking the time and wondering if he really shouldn't be in bed by now...

> "People need to be spoken to, to be taken in hand"

THREE GREAT LPS...

Forget The Go-Betweens' first born! Though they like it, the Rough Trade-issued *Send Me A Lullaby* is a gnarled, edgy debut, the faint promise of something-fine-to-come overwhelmed by dozens of individually harmless irritants, like the chopped hairs the idiot barber lets down your back, combining to set your teeth on edge.

It's the second and third broadcasts, *Before Hollywood* (Rough Trade again) and *Spring Hill Fair* (Sire), that sparkled, and sparkle. ...*Hollywood*, all haunting evocation and faint mysteries, drove one critic to abandon the rest of the still-young decade and declare, "This is the most important LP of the '80s, and will remain so." Yet to me, ...*Fair* is even better, a tour de force of cinematic images, desperate yet ambivalent moods and tense, glowering playing. If any record of the past couple of years contained four better songs than "Bachelor Kisses", "Part Company", "River Of Money" and "Man O' Sand To Girl O' Sea", then I missed it.

Witnessing the new LP's songs live and co-habiting with an advance cassette, it's clear that *Liberty Belle*..., rockier and more positive than its forebears, will maintain The Go-Betweens' heady standards. As McLennan puts it, "The doubters will be in the gutter."

TWO SONGWRITERS. "APART from The Beatles, who else? Who cares about John Cale's songs for the Velvets?"

Grant McLennan is quietly proud of the fairly unique twin-cam-engine, himself and Forster, that drives The Go-Betweens on, well aware of the quality of the material they've contrived. The band signed for Rough Trade before fellow language-before-lather types Aztec Camera and The Smiths, then saw that pair whizz effortlessly over the commercial horizon, leaving them stalled on the starting grid. Didn't that make him bitter, depressed, angry?

A considered, startling response.

"Morrissey got a copy of *Before Hollywood* and listened to it a year before they put their first LP out. I like The Smiths as a singles band and as people, but I know where Morrissey's coming from. It's *Before Hollywood*, and good luck to him because it's a great record."

Apart from their spell as resident failures at Rough Trade, does their continued incompetence at the art of unit-shifting cause any loss of sleep?

"It does irritate me. I don't want to be a songwriter's songwriter, a filmmaker's filmmaker or a musician's musician. I'd like to be like The Band or Talking Heads, bands capable of forays into the hallowed charts every couple of years but who're seen to be doing great work.

"But I'd hate us to be some sort of Velvet Underground figures in 15 years' time..."

Grant's careful, measured answers are not matched on this occasion by Robert Forster's. Considerably liberated by a surfeit of neck-oil, he regales me with a torrent of histrionic boasts, lies and advertisements.

"People need to be spoken to, to be taken in hand, to be told what's happening, and I'm the perfect person to do it.

"Why? Because I can move well. Primarily, I'm a dancer, I've the body to do it. If I wasn't in The Go-Betweens, I'd be in Gladys Knight's Pips. I could wear the flares and do the oohs on 'Midnight Train To Georgia'! Most Australian T-shirt bands are so drab."

My half-hearted attempt to derail a runaway ego by suggesting that all this Rudolph-Nureyev-meets-Gene-Vincent hoopla is an act succeeds only in precipitating another avalanche. Without a trace of a smile, he offers: "Acting? Sure, I'm acting. The Australian cinema is crying out for me. I've got the face for it. With how handsome I am now, I'd make a massive impact like Monty Clift or Marlon Brando. I'll only do a couple of films, revolutionise Australian cinema, then get out.

"Mel Gibson? Jack Thompson? Those guys can only do two things – tell their wives to shut up, and order another beer..."

The venomous contempt with which that last sentence is spat out isn't eased when the apparent indifference of the public to his music – never mind his abilities as a hoofer or a matinee idol – is put to him.

"Fuck it, I'm not looking to posterity. I'm not going to be like Lou Reed or John Cale, 40 and still crying on some A&R man's shoulder.

"But cults are shit too. I despise those people who get off on starving artists, who accept any garbage provided they're one of only five people saw it. They want you to fucking starve and starve...

"Besides, success isn't evenly distributed. It can be stolen, bought, attained by blackmail or bribery. Occasionally, very occasionally, it's achieved by people who actually deserve it."

People like The Go-Betweens?

"I'm confident, I think we'll do it... except that we're up against people like Costello and Weller. Those two should be up for the songwriting equivalent of stealing cars, grand auto theft. They play the last 20 years' soul records, then extract bits with a crowbar..."

To a man on a horse quite this high it seems churlish to suggest it, but maybe Rob's just a little mindful of other Australian bands, like say The Triffids (less talented, undoubtedly, but more successful), not to say a little jealous? The look he shoots me sticks six inches out of my chest. I've never been stabbed by a sneer before.

"A band like The Triffids," he sniffs, "are on the first rung of the ladder to greatness. We're already on the roof. The ladder's long gone."

ONE LAST QUESTION. Maybe there's nothing The Go-Betweens, Beggars Banquet or anyone can do to disentangle them from the annoying web of well-known obscurity in which they seem trapped. Maybe they're fated. Losers even?

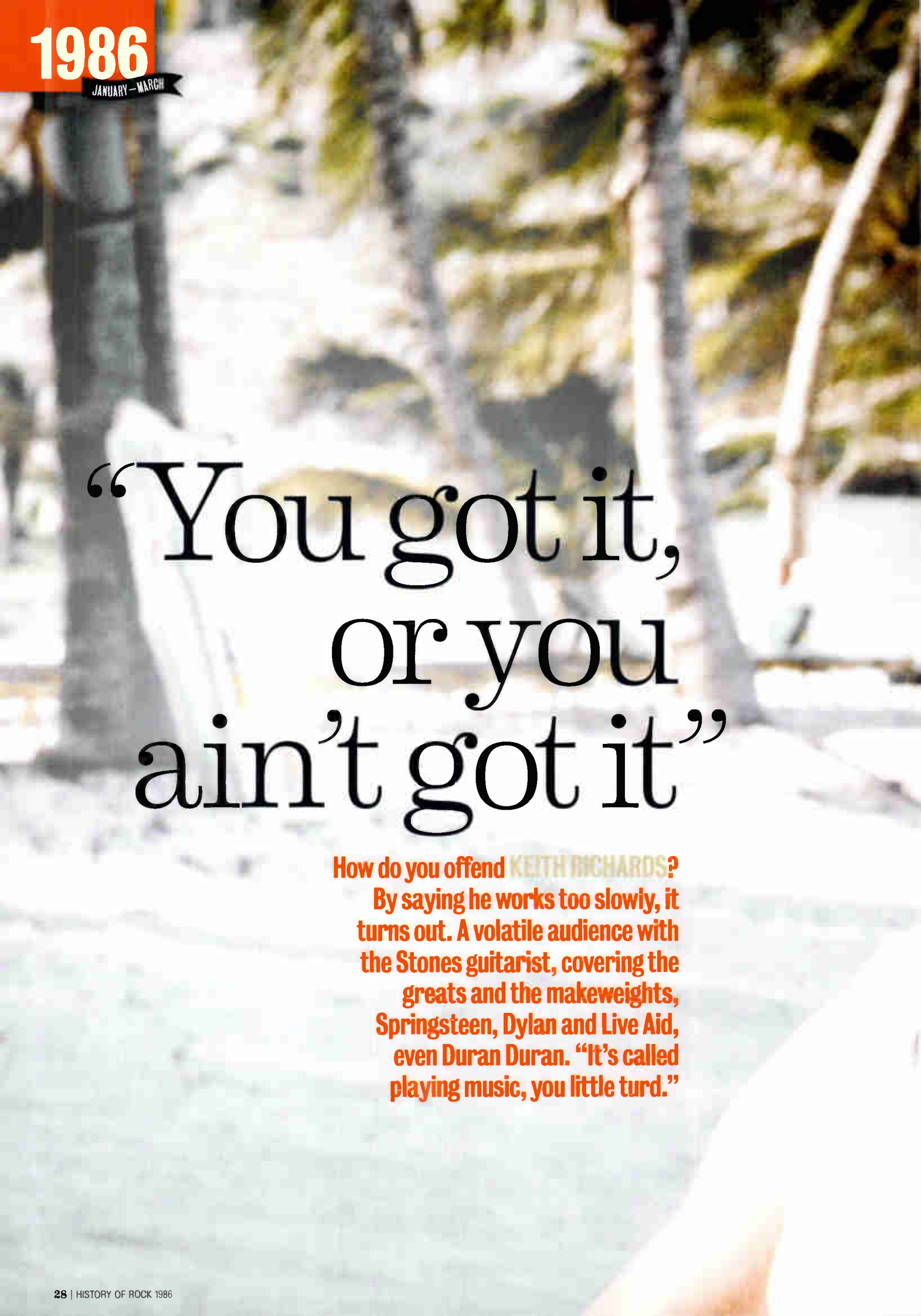
Rob Forster has the last word: "Losers?"

Then several more: "Well, we're definitely troublemakers. I won't die if I don't get the half million in the bank. I have talent, everyone in this band has talent... Grant will write something bigger than songs. I'll write something bigger than songs. I'll write a play or a film or something. Vickers may commit suicide at 30 – I hope not – and Lindy will do something very like suicide before escaping to screen stardom.

"We'll put out these great records and if they're not appreciated, well...", a huge, dismissive shrug, "as for 'losers', you'll have to decide that..."

OK, thanks, I will. It may very well be that somewhere in the complex composition of the organism that is The Go-Betweens there is a crucial flaw that will prevent them from converting their musical wonders into more earthy, tangible rewards. Maybe they are losers, but in a world that regards talentless painted flouncers, purveyors of cash-till, tooth-rot rock as winners, maybe that's no bad thing.

And remember, the best-selling pop work of all time, Wacko Jacko's *Thriller*, had two "l's" in its title. Everything is possible. *Danny Kelly* •



"You got it, or you ain't got it"

How do you offend KEITH RICHARDS? By saying he works too slowly, it turns out. A volatile audience with the Stones guitarist, covering the greats and the makeweights, Springsteen, Dylan and Live Aid, even Duran Duran. "It's called playing music, you little turd."

"We're in a unique position to see if we can make this thing grow up": Keith Richards in 1986

DAVID TAN / SY

NME FEBRUARY 22

WHAT BECOMES A legend most? So exactly how I'd imagined it was the scene that I wouldn't have dared make it up. Before we enter, a bottleneck guitar lick crows hornily from behind the gilt-numbered door of his suite in London's Savoy Hotel.

"I used to come to this place to get thrown out, to get a picture in the paper, right? Now they fucking welcome me with open arms..."

The TV flickers soundlessly, the phone explodes into life every 10 minutes and the Marlboro stubs pile high. A grinning bellboy brings more on a silver tray.

What becomes a legend most?

Jack Daniel's Tennessee sippin' whiskey mixed with Coca-Cola is his tipple: one bottle is already dead when I arrive, and by the time I leave two-and-a-half hours later, so is another. He drinks me under the carpet, no problem. Brown eyes burn out of whites the colour of pickled onions, and though his speech be as slurred as a pirate's, he moves as friskily as a boy scout, never mind a rocker of 42. Truly, he is the biholic man.

What becomes a legend most?

Grey suede pixie boots; clean tight jeans; plum silk shirt; hair like fag ash, shaped at the back, like a thicket at the front; that ring. His wife of two years, ex-model Patti Hansen, is all mumsy and flushed with baby Theodora Dupree Richards, named after not only Keith's maternal grandfather, a dance-band musician, but also a sixth-century Byzantine empress who rose to power from humble origins as a circus acrobat and courtesan. One of Keith's proudest possessions is a coin of Alexander The Great; not a lot of people know that. Meanwhile, Patti is expecting their second.

What becomes a legend most?

HP Sauce, bottles of it, ranked neatly along his mantlepiece.

"You can't get it in New York, so I bring some with me all the time. I don't actually know why I like it; it's harder to kick than heroin, heugh heugh!"

What becomes a legend most...

"I have nothing to hide. I found that's the best way to get along with everybody."

As everyone knows, the Rolling Stones are far more famous for their leisure pursuits than their work. Backstage blowjobs and royal snortergate scandals can routinely enliven a tabloid's slow news day in the '80s, as did Billy Wyman being had up before the beak for pissing against a garage wall in 1965, or the drugs-bust decade of 1967 to 1977...

"Every time I did something bad, I got found out and busted. And I regret being busted, but in the long run it had to happen," croaks the erstwhile Prince Of Darkness, a man fiercely protective of his band's reputation, a man whose seen-it-done-it-been-there duende seems forever battling with a kind of laconic approachability for supremacy of his mood. "When I wasn't high I was in court, heugh heugh! You try saying 25 times, 'Guilty, Your Honour,' in Marlborough Street and keep a straight face. *And* walking out for 260 quid. It was a game, nothing to do with justice or law. It was like, 'We're going to get you, old son, we're going to fucking *do you*!' And they try and it takes place in public and, er... if they'd played their cards right they could have put me in for years. But they tried to pop me for something I hadn't done, and that's where they always fucked up.

"Yet even after all these years I still have a soft spot for the English bobby – the idea of it, know what I mean? It's brilliant and it fucking works, and now they're screwing it up. You might as well strap guns on all of them now.

"In New York if I come out of a studio and there's a police car outside, they give me a lift home – 'Hi Keith, man, how you doin'?' If I see a police car outside in this city, there's a fucking dog inside it. The poor little pigs in the car have hardly shaved and they're trying to fucking razzle *me*?!?"

So you're still hassled?

"No, they ask for autographs...

"I never thought I was wasted, but I probably was. I don't think that necessarily has a big effect on what you do. It just depends; it's such an individual thing. Heroin is bad for you. I don't recommend it for anybody. It's a mug's game, just because of the things you have to go through to get it. But when you're off it, it's a fucking comedy, really. Once you've been through it and out the other end, then you can afford to laugh at it, right? It's only when you don't make it out the other end that, y'know, you can't laugh at anything.

"I learnt I can't afford it. If I want to do what I want to do, then I've got to clean up my act. I don't try and make a living out of being an ex-junkie, I don't fucking tell anybody else what to do.

"I was probably wrong a lot of the time; it did interfere with my job, no doubt. In the long run it really affected it badly, because instead of living like a popstar and being elevated to this weird, unreal status, I was actually on the street trying to score, you know, getting shot at in New York.

"If you were going to buy dope in New York in the '70s and you wanted to get out the front door to carry your dope away so you could get home and get high, you had to have some weight behind you to get out of the door. Cos they'll stick you up downstairs and take all your dope away unless you come down with a shooter in your hand saying, 'Fuck off, motherfucker, I'm leavin', alright?!' OK, so it was like *High Noon*, but fuck it, so what? That was the old days."

Do you still carry a gun in New York?

"Not in New York, no. Outside the state, yes, when I'm on the road. Habit."

Ever fired a shot in anger?

"Don't ask personal questions."

His eyes freeze. Blood pounds in my head. Time to change the subject...

"Bob dropped by on Ronnie one night and I was there. It was a Thursday night, and

> "I regret being busted, but in the long run it had to happen"

Married on December 18, 1983, Keith and Patti Hansen stroll down Beauchamp Place in London's Knightsbridge, 1986

RICHARD YOUNG / REX FEATURES

"You can't play to 90,000 people with three acoustic guitars and no microphones": Keith and Ronnie Wood join Bob Dylan at the US Live Aid concert in Philadelphia, July 13, 1985

Saturday night was the gig, right? I was just doing the Stones album, and Ethiopia was a million miles away..."

Bob is Dylan, Ronnie is Wood, and the gig was Live Aid, JFK Stadium, Philadelphia, July 13, 1985.

"Bob comes down and says, 'Hey maaaan (*authentic-sounding weasel drawl*), are you going to be down Philly on Saturday? Or are you going to watch it on TV?'

"And I said, 'Neither, I'm going to be in the studio working.' And then he disappears with Ronnie for about 20 minutes, and then he comes back downstairs again – 'Heeeey, they want me to play with the Tom Petty band and I don't know those guys. Would you do it?'

"And so, by the time we've had a couple of great rehearsals, Bob's stopping the car down on the freeway from New York to Philadelphia and says, 'Let's do 'It Ain't Me Babe!' Heugh heugh! I says, 'Don't let this get *too* far! I can remember the chords to "Blowin' In The Wind" and "Hollis Brown"', and Woody, who's like an avid Dylan fan, he doesn't know the early stuff, and there's me going, 'Naaah, he didn't play it like that, he played it like this.' 'Cos I studied all that stuff. I mean, I came out of art-school guitar playing – Woody Guthrie, duh duh duh – so Bob Dylan was a natural follow-up..."

> "I nicked a lot off Ry. That's where you get 'Honky Tonk Women' from"

The three of you didn't exactly cover yourselves with glory that night...

"If you could have heard it, it would have been great. But following 24 hours of heavily amplified satellite rock 'n' roll, we were just waiting for the guy to bring the blindfold and the last cigarette, heugh heugh! Screw it, man, it was three acoustic guitars and no microphones – you can't play to 90,000 people with three acoustic guitars and no microphones, especially when they've been blasted the whole day with heavy sounds. It was, 'Here we go, plonk, here's an interlude – better than someone selling ice cream, right?' It was only to feed people, you were not trying to prove anything here. It was very hard, but, y'know, we could've walked off, but fuckin' 'ell, it was fun, I enjoyed it. It was a good laugh. And hats off to Bob."

"BLESS YOUR HEART, heugh heugh!" I'd just blushingly revealed, like the fan I am, that the Stones' 1972 LP *Exile On Main Street* is amongst my favourite records. Despite his chuckle – like, in Mick Brown's priceless phrase, "a large articulated lorry wheezing in a frozen parking lot" – the leathery old hound seems quite genuinely touched by my appreciation.

"I don't make a habit of listening to our old records, and I don't study it with any conscious effort to construct any continuity. We wing it all the way. I go into the studio with no songs at all, and as long as Charlie and Bill and Ronnie think I know what I'm doing, I'll just hammer out some riff, and if the drums pick up and the bass drops in, then maybe we've got something. The Stones rely on that total feel; the rest of it is just salad dressing.

"I'm a songwriter, right? Tin Pan Alley – it's the roughest place in town. But I'm not a tunesmith. If you said to me, 'Write a James Bond theme', forget it, I can't do that. I'm not a Paul McCartney, I can't hammer out something to order."

How about (thinking of his wonderfully haunting score to *Paris, Texas*) Ry Cooder?

"To me, it's very academic, a bit cold-blooded. If you're makin' a country film, you get Ry in, y'know. Ry can toss that stuff off in an afternoon, he isn't stretching anything as far as melody or songs or writing actual music. All he's relying upon is his sound and his technique, which is what he'll always fall back on, y'know.

"I nicked a lot off him. I took him for all he was worth. That's where you get 'Honky Tonk Women' from, know what I mean? His tuning, the fucking lot. I ripped him off."

When you played five-string guitars? »

BETTMAN / GETTY

"Yeah, banjo tuning. I still do. But he didn't invent it either, no way. It's called the Sears Roebuck tuning, where you'd send away to Chicago or some weird box number in Baton Rouge and, allowing six to eight weeks for delivery, you'd get what you sent away for. After the First World War, Sears Roebuck started to flog guitars instead of banjos real cheap to get them going on the market, and all the spades used to send away for their guitar and when they'd get it there's one extra string. And they'd take it off and tune it like a banjo and play the same thing again with a louder box. And so it evolved."

I heard Robert Cray?

"Yeah, he's good, but for me it's Slim Harpo, Jimmy Reed..."

But those guys are dead.

"That's what recordings are for, so you live forever. But in this business it's 97 per cent crap, right? The gems are very few and far between, and nobody can come up with it all the time. If you can keep on hanging in, if you've got enough goodwill going with the customers... It's like a corner grocery store, 30 years in the same location, we're still churning it out; and if you like it, it's here and you know where to get it. It's a very simple thing. All you've got to do is be honest. Honest to the people you're putting out to and honest to yourself."

What about quality control? Your last LP, *Undercover*, was dull, it didn't happen at all.

"No, it didn't. It was pissed around as if it was a toy. Every time somebody wanted something to do and they wanted to get away from the old lady, they went to the studio and pissed around with the tapes.

"It was the best we could do at time. It's a very hard record to ask me questions about. Apart from playing on it, I had very little to do with it 'cos I wasn't allowed in the country where it was being mixed, but I had to live with it. It wasn't a brilliant album, whichever way you look at it. The thing is, when you're at that point of finishing it off, you're in the least position to judge because you've been sitting on the fucking thing for about a year and you're totally blown away.

"There are lots of dips, and every now and again there's a great high point. Like a *Tattoo You* [1981], taken out of the can, some of it over 10 years old. That's what you get with experience – a few things left in the fucking attic you can draw on occasionally. Some of it was outtakes from *Goat's Head Soup*, the winter of '71 in Jamaica. You just try and make the best of what's available, it doesn't matter where it comes from. If I hadn't told you what date things were, nobody would know anyway, right? It doesn't make any difference, it doesn't worry Mozart."

The Stones make records dead slowly...

"The Stones move slowly, their wonders to perform – but what d'you expect? D'you want a miracle, every fucking day? May be a semi-miracle, right? We don't work dead slow, we work the way we work. It's none of your fucking business whether it's slow or fast. Get the fuck out! What d'you mean, 'dead slow'? Did anybody moan at Beethoven how long it took him to write the '1812 Overture'?"

If, at that point, I'd pedantically remarked to Keith that it was, in fact, Tchaikovsky who wrote the '1812 Overture', I think he'd have killed me on the spot.

"Maybe the more time you put into it, the better it is, alright? C'mon. If I want to work fast, I'll work fast, I'll work for Ford's in Dagenham, right? Work to the crack of the fucking whip. That's why I'm a musician, I can't work like that. If you don't like it, that's my tough shit. You don't have to buy it. You'll get it for free anyway, what have you got to worry about?

"I was making records before you were fucking born! It makes me feel stupid and you, right? What kind of organisation is it where you can just whip things out? The Rolling Stones – fast and quick and brilliant! But it doesn't work like that, son."

A bona fide rock'n'roll album

ALBUMS REVIEW 1986

MM MAR 29 With Keith focused, Mick in great voice and only the odd dubious lyric, the Stones' 18th LP is a keeper.

The Rolling Stones
Dirty Work ROLLING STONES RECORDS

After all these years, the Stones have suddenly learned how to play like professionals. Sure, Charlie drops a beat occasionally and there's the odd sloppy guitar chord, but *Dirty Work* is one of their most consistent sets of songs ever and, with the possible exception of *Tattoo You*, has the fullest, chunkiest sound.

All that stuff about the imminent demise of Keith Richards looks rather quaint in retrospect. The man is presumably made of indestructible bionic materials. Whatever, the story goes that *Dirty Work* was mostly his baby, and everything points to a man with his head screwed on and his grip unimpaired. "*Your love is a sweet addiction, I can't clean you out of my veins*," Jagger sings in the rugged opener "One Hit (To The Body)". "*It's a life-long addiction that has damaged my brain.*" The subtext here probably goes something like: "Heroin screws other people up but not us." All around, gospelly girls moan and Richards' guitar pumps out bulldozer chords. The irony is exceedingly pointed.

Several of these performances are bewilderingly quick-witted for such a bunch of old gits. "Winning Ugly" slipstreams along between terse bursts of lead guitar and blowsy vocal harmonies, with Jagger really singing for a change (throughout, he steers well clear of stupid West Indian voices and the ludicrous ham accents he prefers when he's bored or allowed to be lazy). It's kind of AOR with teeth.

Best of the bunch is the riveting "Back To Zero", a steamy swamp-funk operation with rhythm guitars twitching like garrotting wire. Is that Bobby Womack in there somewhere? Belatedly, the Stones reveal that they put in some hours with their Little Feat and Meters records, presumably when they got sick of the Vandellas and Sam Cooke.

It's only the lyrics that let them down, very badly on a couple of occasions. "Fight", one of the album's less interesting rockers, is all about hitting people and blowing up buildings, self-consciously ignorant.

"Had It With You", another of the album's less interesting rockers, begins "*I love you, dirty fucker*" and ends "*You're a mean mis-treater, a dirty, dirty rat scum.*" Perhaps a spot of misogyny-by-numbers has become part of the Stones' formula. It's bad enough doing it when you're a young wastrel, but it's sickening from men over 40.

Pianos ring loud and you can feel the flesh on metal guitar strings

Deliberate ploy or not, there's evidence of pacing and planning here. The disc moves through its rockers, shakes a limb with "Harlem Shuffle", does a Clash-type reggae number in "Too Rude", and winds down finally with Keith's elegant ballad "Sleep Tonight". Co-producer Steve Lillywhite may well have taken a hand here. He's also managed to give the Stones a clear, powerful sound where pianos ring loud and clear and you can feel the flesh on metal guitar strings. Neat tribute to Ian Stewart right at the end, too.

Dirty Work is a bona fide rock'n'roll album, a difficult thing to pull off in 1986. It won't appeal to the soul-boys and the hip-hoppers, of course, and for that we should give thanks. It's one of the Stones' albums you can keep.

Adam Sweeting

I'm not trying to get up your nose.

"You 'ave."

Sorry.

"Don't be sorry. The last thing you should be is sorry. You should be glad you got up my nose; not many do. But what I'm saying is, so we work slow, what's that got to do with it? If I want to take 40 years to make a fucking record, I'll take it, if that's what it takes to make a good record in my humble opinion then that's what it'll take. You can't just say, 'Let's bung it onto two or four tracks and let's go, baby!'"

Why not?

"I should go to the garage again, right?"

Would that be such a bad idea?

"And then you'll turn around and say, 'Oh, nostalgia!' You can't deny that's the state of the fucking art. It's a matter of realities. It's got nothing to do with the ideal rock'n'roll heaven where guys just pop in. We do that all the time: I've got cassettes full of it. I can make better records on that machine (*pointing at my Walkman*) than most people do in the fucking top joint in town."

Then why not put them out?

"Because, darlin', the record company would toss it back at me."

What about that Springsteen record, *Nebraska*?

"Well, you go to Nebraska and see how you like it. I like Bruce; he's a nice, good, fucking journeyman, y'know. He ain't no brilliant artist. I've seen the fucking tops work, tops like Joe Tex, Solomon Burke, James Brown, fucking Otis Redding, Curtis Mayfield and The Impressions, Chuck Willis, fucking Sam Cooke, Bobby Womack – I've seen the tops work, right? Fucking Count Basie, know what I mean? So don't give me fucking Bruce Springsteen!

"He's a good boy and he's holding the fort until something good comes along. If there was anything better around, he'd still be working the bars of New Jersey. C'mon, there's better. If you look, there's better. And he'd be the first to say so. I'd rather have Sam Cooke than the Rolling Stones, know what I mean? But in the absence of anything better, Bruce is filling a good gap. What else you got?"

I reckon that kind of blows Keith's chances of being invited to play on Jacko's next LP. But back to the new Stones album, titled *Too Rude*...

"This one took 10 months. After two years off the road, not fucking bad. We take as long as we want; we have that luxury, we've worked for that luxury. And the reason the rest of the bands can do that nowadays is because we've worked for that luxury. We said, 'Fuck, we're not going to have some A&R man from Decca, we're gonna lease out tracks so we have artistic control.' That's why you got good albums; that's why you got a load of slimy little kids now fucking around. So don't fucking give the old fucking cobblers to me.

"With this album especially, we try and take it 'You got it' or 'You ain't got it'. Boom. Two takes. Everybody else thinks it's highly amusing. You get Duran Duran come down for a day, walk into our fucking sessions and say, 'What are you doing in that room together?' It's called playing music, man. That's the only way we record, you snotty little turd.

"I like to use whatever's available. There's no point in trying to drag things back; what one has to do is deal with what's available and try and balance it out. Very difficult. Believe me, if it was easy I'd have done it.

"This is a band: I record a fucking band. And I try and make the best Rolling Stones record I can. And you can lump it or leave it, I don't give a shit. I try and turn out a good fucking deal for everybody – for the band, for myself, everybody walks away happy, including the customers. Because there's no point in playing music to an empty room, right?

"We're in a unique position to see if we can make this thing grow up. No one's taken it beyond this stage. We know guys in other related fields, like Muddy Waters, and there's still Chuck and Bo, and the Stones have got a possibility of, maybe, if they want to, making this thing mature as opposed to get wasted. That would be a feather in the cap. You don't have to, y'know, prance around and run five miles round a stadium in a poofy football suit to prove anything. There's no point pretending to be Peter Pan."

Isn't that what Mick does?

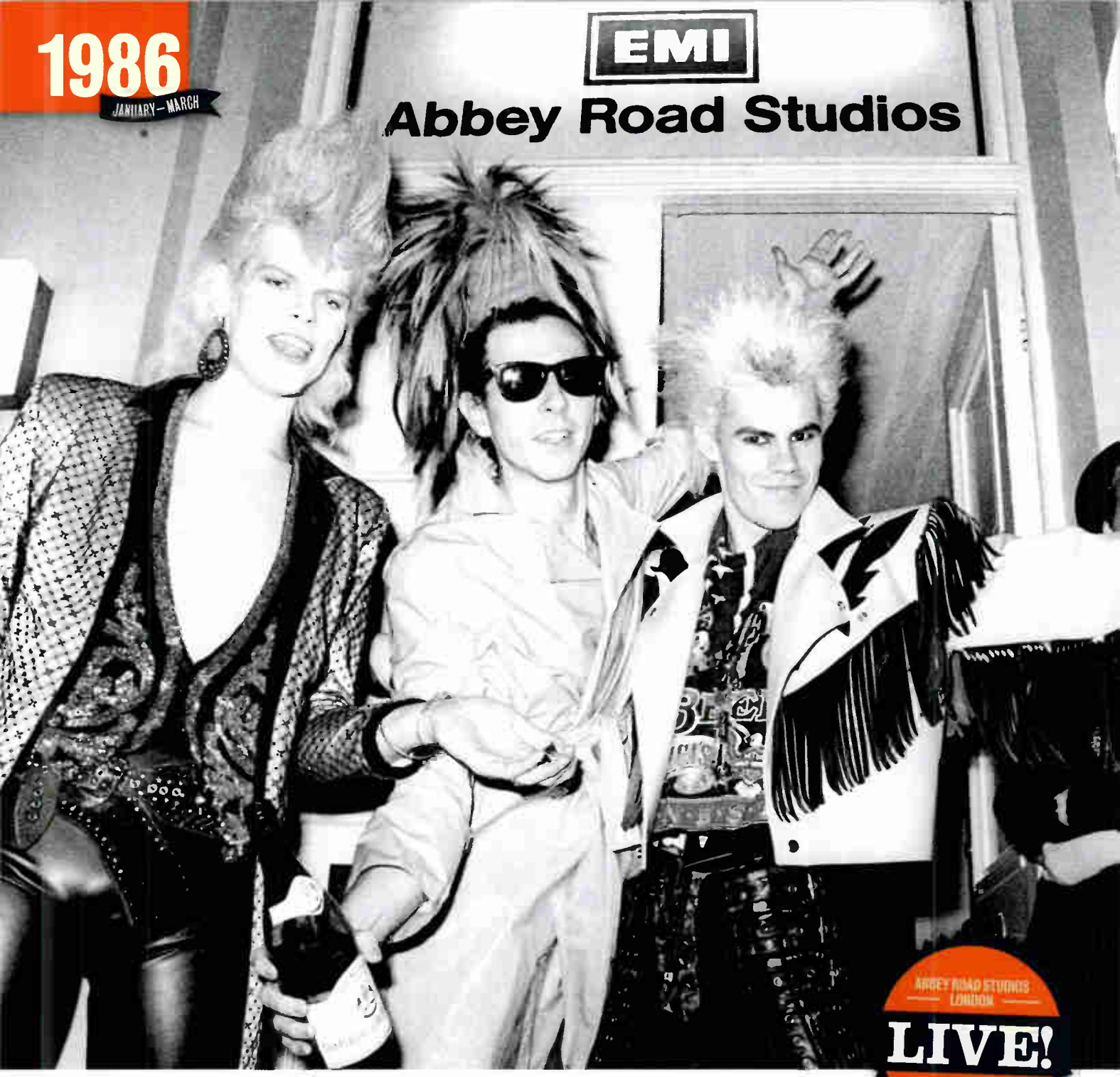
"Maybe Mick'll grow up! That's my idea, and I'm saying that if they want to, they could. I'm not saying they would be successful at it; it is new ground, an interesting area rather than just like going through the fucking motions.

"The reason we're still together is that we're still here – give or take one or two – and still playing, and still, I think, have a lot to offer. The only reason nobody's got to this point in rock'n'roll is that the audience have never got there. I mean, you're only as old as your audience, and we'll all go to heaven together, but know what I mean? Three steps..." *Mat Snow* •

The Rolling Stones in London in 1986: (l–r) Bill Wyman, Charlie Watts, Keith Richards, Mick Jagger and Ronnie Wood

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY

"I try and make the best Stones record I can. Lump it or leave it"



The manufacture of a myth

MM JAN 4 Concept future punks Sigue Sigue Sputnik storm Abbey Road to kickstart a hype-fuelled year.

NAUGHTY, NAUGHTY. MUCH of what went on tonight was a question of who was using who. It's one thing for SSS to screw the system, entertaining us mightily along the way – our guerrilla accountants, as it were. It's quite another when we're roped in and our curiosity raped to feed the fantasy legend, dumb extras in their continuing saga of success.

I'm all too prepared for SSS to bleed the business dry, and I'm happy to participate in the ensuing wake, but tonight the lights stayed on for the TV cameras, the cleaners cleared up around us, the SSS shock-horror video show mysteriously stayed under wraps (too expensive to stage apparently) and, ironically, the atmosphere they hoped to hype suffered accordingly. We really felt we were being used, our enthusiasm abused in the name of history in the mock-making.

Not that we consider SSS the pinnacle of altruism – they're not Robin Hoods or anything remotely like that – but when the audience feels duped, then the complicated clause between subversion and exploitation is being mismanaged. So, what did we get out of tonight? We were herded into a hallowed studio never before used as a venue and expected to feel thankful because, in 12 months' time, we'll be able to say in that one-upman way: "Well, I never saw the Sex Pistols, but I saw Sigue Sigue Sputnik."

We got involved in the manufacture of a myth.

More than that it's still hard to say. We wobbled about to that glorious T Rex riff, cranked out with cruel cool by the beautifully cartoon Neal X, possibly pop's most perfect creation – Billy Idol, Elvis, Sid 'n' Nancy all rock'n'rolled into one. We saw Martin Degville mince through his camp aggression, growling like a pussycat at the punters who thought they'd (re) discovered punk rock and hurled plastic glasses at the edifice of false hair piled high into a synthetic peroxide porcupine.

We were tickled pink by Tony James' fencing mask and laughed even louder when he removed it to reveal a grin as big as his bank account. Oh, and we got confusion... The thugs down the front obviously took all this business seriously, chose to ignore the cheesy grins and

RAY STEVENSON | REX FEATURES

Getting the Abbey habit: (l-r) Sigue Sigue Sputnik's Neal X, Tony James and Ray Mayhew, December 1985

Billy Bragg: kicking things off with "trusted protest favourites"

There is an answer

MM MAR 29 Red Wedge give a send-off to the Greater London Council.

HAMMERSMITH ODEON LONDON

LIVE!

MARCH 27

I WANNA BEE anarcheeee... only we're 10 years on from snot and nihilism. Now it's snot and socialism, I wanna bee a Red Wedgeee. This ain't rock'n'roll but lock, stock and barrel necessity.

All joined to wave farewell to the GLC – Wedgies on stage, well-wishers in stalls, and politicians (including Bernie Grant) waiting in the wings. The Wedgies played almost in reverse order of importance (that's equity – of course), with Billy Bard opening the festivities with "It Says Here", "Between The Wars" and other trusted protest favourites, before yielding to the rap attack of Lorna Gee and the Stax and soul bric-a-brac of Weller and The Style Council.

Here they were, the club decried as Saatchi & Saatchi socialism. They are. They should be. Fight slogans with better slogans. Yet the Wedgies' pace and lineup often lacked commercial timing. If Weller narrowly failed to stir up a storm in a teacup, the arrival of Junior put arsenic in the pot.

Junior's lame funk wrapped in lamé extracts all the right ingredients, but the results were just too emasculated for the hostile surrounds of the Odeon. His slot moved from killing time to painfully murdering it and leaving the corpse for the buzzards, and only Mel Gaynor (a Simple-Minded drummer) and Julie Roberts hauled the limbs of "Come On Over To My Place" into life. The song's gleeful response epitomised the Wedgies' dilemma. To make Red Wedge exciting and attractive, they must always surprise – always add new and unexpected faces to the well-worn parade of stalwart profiles.

If Weller failed to stir up a storm in a teacup, the arrival of Junior put arsenic in the pot

The one surprise duo to hit the boards received a standing ovation without having to sing a single note: Ken Livingstone and Ted Knight, the errant martyrs of Thatcher's comedy of errors. The effect of Ken's impassioned oration resembled a school panto. Ken says Mrs T – "Hiss." The Law Lords – "Boo." The GLC – "Hooray." Aladdin and the Widow Twanky strode off to cries of "It's behind you!" and kept the Red Flag flying bright until the slink and swagger of Dr Robert and his Blow Monkeys stifled the breeze.

Tonight, you had to have Bragg's patter, Weller or Livingstone's position, or Somerville and Julie Roberts' voice to raise the pulse rate past room temperature.

Jimmy's amazing falsetto was sharp enough to rattle the fillings at the back of the mouth, as songs like the Brechtian "Breadline Britain" hung stark in the wasteland. The truly wonderful "You Are My World" paved the way for duets with Sarah-Jane (with roles reversed – of course), and the minority monopoly was complete when Junior returned with the odd Animal Nightlifer, Martin from the Maddy Boys and Aladdin Livingstone on tambourine (he can put it in his CV when the GLC is RIP).

An acoustic Tom Robinson – the original do-gooder doing badly – proved he was still very glad to be grey, while Carl from Madness was just glad to be there. He tinkled the ivories, told the odd joke, modelled an umbrella, and delighted the crowd with his version of vaudeville, which showed you can even be normal and be a Wedgee.

From Working Week's "Sweet Nothing", the entire ensemble returned for something resembling "Many Rivers To Cross" and an all-inspiring "Move On Up". Those who came to watch their favourite pop star might well have come away disappointed. Those who came to draw succour from the evening and rekindle their belief that there is an answer to the vile Mrs T found solace and strength in numbers. The appeal buckets rattled, the politicians prattled as an evening marred by rambling fledglings, yet marked by sudden bursts of great achievement, came to a premature end.

A fitting way to bid farewell. *Red Ted Mico*

got all worked up. Good for them. Meanwhile, the celebs at the back who'd come to carp, left grooving. Severin, for one, thought they were fab; "The new Mud. I can see them at Batley Working Men's Club in six years' time."

I just saw everything pop I'd ever nightmared about paraded around in a gorgeous panto parody. Needless to say, "Shoot It Up" will be a big smasheroonie with its Glitter/Damned terrace chorus, a semblance of a tune and line about giving head – bound to be banned by the Beeb. Perfect.

Needless also to say that their "Twist And Shout" (just like Tony James' "Better Dead Than Red" T-shirt, modelled for the benefit of the TV execs who were investigating his credentials to go on the box anti-Red Wedge) was a piece of precise opportunism, at once exorcising, celebrating and ridiculing the ghosts of pop past in one giggling gang-bang of noise.

Naughty. Naughty. But Neat. Neat. Neat.

Steve Sutherland

JIM STEINFELD / GETTY

"I can't really lose at this smugness I've invented for myself": John Lydon in 1986

"I'm bad news, boys and girls"

JOHN LYDON returns with an great new single and an album made with "damned fine people". Still he can't escape his past, and McLaren, *Sid & Nancy*, even Led Zeppelin are in his eyeline. "Someone," he says, "will be getting a black eye."

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 8 —

"I'M HERE FOR purely commercial gain, and that's the way it is," John Lydon explained by way of introduction. "Not that I need the money, but every little extra bit counts."

He doesn't like interviews much, generally regarding the press as a pack of cretinous leeches, asking stupid questions and squabbling over drops of Lydon's anaemic blood. Last time he came out of hiding, flitting from his warm Los Angeles lair to the gnawing London winter in late '83, he gave a press conference at which, judging by published reports thereof, he gave dull answers to boring questions.

In his memory banks, he's logged it as a victory, inevitably. I wasn't there, so don't ask me. "It was fun," he insists, in a voice peppered with elongated vowels and preposterous over-emphatic consonants. He hasn't changed much. He's 30 (28 if you prefer the *Standard*'s version, but I can't imagine Lydon telling them the truth about anything), his complexion is still that familiar pasty white, and his eyes often bore out at you malevolently. With his carrotty hair twisted like pipe-cleaners, his body slight and cramped, he resembles an albino puppet, or some »

album

PiL

SHEILA ROCK / REX FEATURES

sort of Dickensian pickpocket. He is, however, relaxed and easily amused nowadays. Rather entertaining company, in fact, when he decides to talk.

"It was great to see all those wankers out there," he continues, recalling his infamous press conference, "who didn't dare to be sarky with me 'cos the rest would then have pinned them to the ground. I let them get on with their own battle and just wafted across the top of it. I liked that. I thought I successfully made them look like the wankers they are. That's my opinion... and you're fuming."

Actually, I'm just glad he's talked for 45 seconds without me having to chivvy him on with increasingly lame questions. It's hard work interrogating a man whose only object is not to tell you anything.

Certain topics goad him into life, luckily. His recent legal victory against the slippery Malcolm McLaren clearly fills him with unbridled jubilation, for instance. It appears the case has been brewing for years. Lydon only went to court, as he tells it, when he was sure he could win.

"The case has been festering for aeons, hasn't it? It's outrageous that it took so long. Anybody got a light? But it's nice to win." He lit a cigarette and emitted a knowing chuckle.

No love lost between you and the great man, then?

"There's nothing great about him," snarled Lydon. "Except he grated my nerves, and that's about it."

He seems to be doing alright for himself, though.

"Yeah, well he managed to outswindle himself, didn't he? He lost that case with classic style."

Revenge is sweet?

"I didn't fight this case for revenge." Course not. "I fought it because what was rightfully mine was denied to me for so long, and so justice won out! But it cost a fortune in costs. It's a 10-year case. It's ludicrous. He wouldn't settle. He thought I had no case – a sorry mistake. My barrister wanted me in the witness box and that's what we were rushing forward to, and that's when Malcolm backed down."

His voice dropped to a slow, deliberate smirk. "I'd be rather good there."

He pondered for a moment, savouring the idea of a flattened McLaren (also resident of LA these days, ironically. Hope they don't go to the same supermarket.) "He looked a wally in court in his knickerbockers. Someone should have photographed that..."

Lydon has subjected himself to a series of bouts with the press, lest we forget, because his fabulous single "Rise" is getting almost as much airplay as AOR stalwarts like Sting and Dire Straits. Lydon is amazed and delighted, having spent so long banned from the airwaves because of his Sex Pistols days. Certainty, "Rise" is a cut or 50 above the horrible "This Is Not A Love Song", PiL's last single as far as anyone can remember.

The new song is credited to Lydon and Bill Laswell, who also produced. PiL, however, is just Lydon. He merely chooses additional people with whom to work in the studio.

"PiL is technically me, officially me," explained the act, "and anybody I work with on my songs. They are my songs. He's a producer and you have to put their name on the thing. I didn't want no names at all, I wanted it to be completely blank because it really is one of those records where the music's just so damned good. Can't be disputed. Except by *Blitz*" (who'd run a sneaky preview of the forthcoming PiL album). "Highly derogatory. Someone will be getting a black eye, I can assure you. It's the same old viciousness really, uncalled for. Really stupid and juvenile."

One choked back a guffaw by swallowing a large handkerchief. This from the notorious oik Rotten who frightened old ladies and was sick in airports!

Everything's changed. The album features drummer Ginger Baker, formerly of Cream and the sort of chap the Pistols wanted to kill off, as well as Tony Williams, another drummer and a man of impeccable muso pedigree. On guitar is a certain Steve Vai, described by Laswell in *The Wire* as a man "maybe taking electric guitar into a whole other area, and maybe past what people even expect the electric guitar to be able to do".

"Damned fine people," says Lydon, perhaps or

Home

FIN COSTELLO / REX FEATURES

Lydon with his wife Nora Forster, a German publishing heiress and mother of The Slits' Ari Up

perhaps not sarcastically. "It can be quite frightening working with professionals. I liked it. There's a few Africans floating around too and a chap called Shankar on violin and Sakamoto on keyboards. Not a bad team. That's like winning 10-nil before you begin."

Times change. Led Zep are back! Just check the Beastie Boys.

"Naaaaah," said Lydon in a pathetic imitation of his famous sneer. "Nowhere near as good. Or as bad. There were elements to Led Zeppelin I've always liked. I've always liked their drum sound." Didn't we all? "They were always good on dynamics, songs like 'Kashmir'."

Don't be ridiculous. Let's move on to personal weaknesses.

"I'm not going to tell you about them."

Yes you are.

"Vanity. Let's face it, I am one of the world's vainest human beings, and I love it."

Laziness too, perhaps?

"Naaah, everybody says that and it couldn't possibly be true. I work bloody hard when I work. And work very well too. There it goes again, the vanity.

"Not as often as most people, because I don't feel the need to rush into things. I don't like to do anything unless I'm completely sure about it. This album took about two years to write, I spent a lot of time on it, and getting the people together that I thought would do the best job and the cheapest. Money was a bit of a problem."

> "Real estate is a good way of earning money by doing nothing"

Basically, Lydon would prefer to do nothing almost all the time. He loathes the music business, hates New York ("one big stinking traffic jam"), despises video ("the Polaroids of the film industry") and thinks most known pop stars are worthless dickheads. Consequently, he finds property speculation intriguing.

"I find real estate quite an interesting hobby. I like buying and selling for outrageously extravagant prices. It's a good way of earning money by doing nothing at all. My old house in London, I got it for £14,000. It's now worth £120,000. Outrageous. Amazing. It looks like four dirty grey walls to me, but I won't say no to the loot. No qualms at all about selling it at that price. What a bargain!"

Meanwhile, what of his former PiL cohorts, Keith Levene and Jeanette?

"I've no idea."

Don't care?

"No, not at all. They're not doing anything, obviously."

Did you feel you were just carrying them?

"I've had a lot of dead weight around me over the years, yeah. Driftwood. Funny that, yes... now I come to think of it, most of the people I've worked with have done nothing since. I've destroyed their lives." He lapsed into a long wheezing chuckle. "I'm bad news, boys and girls."

Presumably nobody asked you to do Live Aid?

Lydon looked appalled. "No, and quite rightly so and all 'cos the answer would be no, most definitely. What a no-hope project that is."

Why?

"Oh come on. There's a civil war going on there. Don't you think it's a slightly condescending attitude to completely ignore that major fact? 'Oh, let's feed the millions.' They're at bloody war with one another, for God's sake. They're more than likely to shoot ya. You can't interfere with things like that, it's very dangerous.

"Because it's politically motivated, it has to be. Someone's behind it, it's not Geldof. He's just a figurehead. And he's going to have to account for an awful lot of lost money, and we all know it's going to happen – we've all seen Bangla-fucking-desh, haven't we? All the goodwill in the world doesn't amount to fuck all if it's not properly directed. What those people need is education, irrigation. Not a ham sandwich. So everyone will get a ham sandwich for one day. That's about it really, isn't it?"

Live Aid are providing education and irrigation, aren't they?

"They might be doing that now, but they weren't earlier on. I remember David Byrne saying similar things to what I'm saying. But there are organisations already set up to do that kind of thing, like Oxfam, et-cetera-ah. To completely ignore them and set up your own gang makes me well suspicious."

As an afterthought, he added, "Why don't they move? Nothing grows there, does it?"

And Sun City?

"That sounds like a load of foolishness to me. Just don't play there, simple, but you don't have to go and shout and scream and rave about it and put out a record and go, 'Oooh, look how clever I am, I really care.' It's daft. Where's the money going?"

Enough of that, then. You may recall that Lydon appeared in a film called *Order Of Death*, with Harvey Keitel, once upon a time. It was lousy, and he didn't enjoy it very much. He hasn't done any acting since, but would if someone offered him a decent script.

"Harvey's a bit brutal. He takes this method acting well too seriously. Those were real scenes. I've still got the bruises to show it. It wasn't that difficult, though. I stayed blind drunk most of the time, which helped. It was a lousy script, impossible to follow or understand. Made very little sense.

"They ruined it in America at the premiere; they showed the end first and it was reviewed as such, terrible. It bombed really badly because of that. It was never made to be a big seller; it was done on a very low budget for next to nothing, apart from Harvey's wages of course.

"Most of the scenes, I didn't have the slightest idea what was happening. I was completely clueless because Harvey would be there rewriting the scenes at night and I'd come in the next morning, so it was pointless trying to learn dialogue and I just went along with the flow. For that I did quite well, I thought. Doesn't look like I'm totally confused."

Or does it? Lydon, who likes to take everything to the edge and is usually bluffing wildly, says he intends to undertake a spot of leisurely touring to promote his new album, which is illuminatingly entitled *Album*. In '83, he came over with a Holiday Inn band in penguin suits, who were scared to death at the yelling, gobbing mobs who greeted them each night. This time he might just use pick-up bands in whichever country he finds himself.

Does he not find it astonishing that people still pay to see him after the dismal performances he's turned in over the years? Because he's just taking the punters for a ride, after all.

"No, I offer a well entertaining show," he chortled.

You believe that, do you?

"Yes I do. I can't really lose at this smugness I've invented for myself. Must be infuriating for all you journalist chaps out there."

Won't everyone turn round one day and say, "Sod it, he's gone too far this time"?

"No. I'm thoroughly amazed by people's stupidity. I like to push things to their absolute limit, but I'm not doing that when I make records or performances. But I do like to play with the interviews. I suppose even though I'm utterly bland, that's shocking in itself."

The only thing that seems to prick him out of his mocking cynicism is the thought of Alex Cox's forthcoming movie about Sid Vicious and Nancy, *Love Kills*. "A thoroughly disgusting thing to do," fumes Lydon, though it's not clear whether he's affronted more by the idea of Cox making a comedy of Sid's life or by the fact that someone will portray Rotten in the film.

"Without me being consulted, that's quite appalling bad business on his part, very rude. I'm still alive, boy. He just might get some serious legal action. I'll have to consider that. Bloody rude. I don't forget things like that very easily."

For the meantime, however, we can savour the prospect of Lydon on silly old *TOTP* (he insists he won't do it) and wrap an ear round his heavy-metallish new album, also available on compact disc for those of you with more money than sense.

And finally, John, what will you be when...

"I'm 64? A right rancid moany old git."

John Lydon, this is your life. *Adam Sweeting* •

"Far from serious"

Enter the world of the VIOLENT FEMMES – ironic, oddball, and making a lot of converts to their ersatz Southern gothic. "What we try and do is just play music that we like, and we don't take it upon ourselves to be leaders in any vanguard of something," says their drummer.

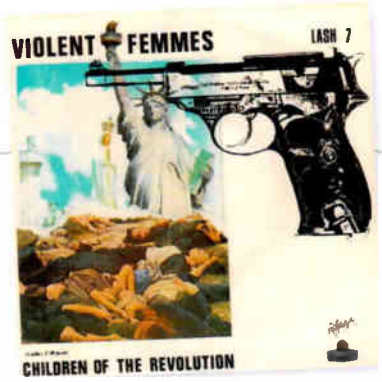
PAUL NATKIN / GETTY

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 1 —

AND SO THE Lord saw fit to deliver three Milwaukeean flukes, misfits to a man, safely from Australia to jolly up a club or two in this Godforsaken land and face an amiable inquisition concerning, among other things, their Oedipal overdrive. So, how come their eclectic cut-the-crap clatter, their jaunty, wide-eyed confessionals, their black and blue corn comedies invariably tantalise us toward memories (or promises, depending on your teen perspective) of snogging and suicide? And how come every time the elfin, bespectacled Gordon Gano declares he's got "Faith", I recall Ray Milland in *The Man With The X-Ray Eyes*, clawing out his wretched, overambitious orbs in a desert evangelists' tent at the ranting behest of an inflammatory Bible thumper? And, again, how come these country death songs are so twee yet so disturbing, baptised in tradition yet somehow heretic, mocking their mentors?

"Ah, I think this band is probably one of the most ironic bands around," explains Gano, singer and songwriter of the Violent Femmes. "I really enjoyed an English write-up of one of our shows which said it was too bad that we were doing something that was musically, lyrically and show-wise worthwhile, but at the same time, we were making such fools of ourselves because we were too stupid to realise what was going on. »

June 30, 1983: (l-r) Gordon Gano, Brian Ritchie and Victor DeLorenzo of the Violent Femmes busking in Chicago



"That's the thing about this band – in the songs, in the whole performance of them, there's all different levels of total contradiction going on at the same moment, where we are serious and as far from being serious as possible. It's important and also far away from being important."

Thus, the Violent Femmes, too contradictory, perhaps too confusing, for most pop palates. Or, again perhaps, confused rather than confusing?

"No. Too many people, not only musicians nowadays, but politicians, actors, painters, what have you, tend to take themselves so utterly seriously. I find that really boring." This is the preppy, straight-to-the-point-of-sinister stand-up drummer Victor DeLorenzo speaking.

"People's feelings now tend to run towards pessimism, so I think, in not taking ourselves seriously and trying to live within the moment of what's happening on stage, the irony comes across as a comment on something rather than just a gimmick, which is what a lot of people use it as.

"People should be aware that, in everyday life, there's all kinds of dichotomies in every individual, so why not afford that kind of opportunity to a writer?"

WHAT THE FEMMES entertain us with is an organic migration from tradition to anti-tradition, irony avoiding cynicism, irony-working-on-irony. Most crucially and comically of all, they refuse to confront. They're not about to embark on a crash course of rebel rock poses to polarise their attitudes into any familiar guerrilla stance. The Violent Femmes, sweet boys that they are, won't play ball.

In the cosy, subversive tradition of all things pop, the assumption, say, that any mention of family or church must be tongue in cheek and daggers drawn is implicitly denied by the Femmes' refusal to allay our confusion. They don't give us the benefit of cheap clench-fisted posturing à la The Alarm; they simply don't let on because it's not their concern.

Which is not to say they're dumb or dubious (though the latter is often possible). No, they're aware of their contexts alright; they're aware of their reputation within the scheme of things; they're only too aware of what's expected of them, and not only will they not play along but, sin of sins, they won't make a big hoo-ha about not doing so. They won't even be anti-rebel rebels to satiate our desire for category.

So, do they mean all this God stuff or don' they? I guess that's the thrill. And the skill? The instinctive enthusiasts' discernment between irony and cynicism – the former affectionate, positive and involved; the latter bitter, destructive and detached.

"Exactly," agrees this pleasant Victor. "You have to deal with the problems rather than commenting on them."

So, again, how come we can't accept hillbillies except on a kitsch level? How come we have to pretend there's parody being brought into play?

"Dunno?" The voice is louder than the rest, issuing from what should be a hippy by looks but isn't. This thorn in pop's side is called, currently, Brian Ritchie and he spouts and plays guitars.

"We have an affection for the music and for the audience. Once a band starts to think that they're smarter than their audience, that's when they lose the ability to create music that communicates."

"I think we've cultivated our own uniqueness in a way that people feel we more or less represent the truth that we feel, not the truth of the recording industry, which, right now, is that you have to have a massive drum sound and try and sing like Bryan Ferry. It's much easier being self-indulgent than trying to please everybody. What we try and do is just play music that we like, and we don't take it upon ourselves to be leaders in any vanguard of something."

But Victor, what seems so simple and natural to you seems extraordinarily weird to us.

MEAN FIDDLER, HARLESDEN, LONDON
LIVE!
FEBRUARY

Whooping melodrama

MM MAR 1 The Violent Femmes play an epic, "off the reservation" set.

"WHAT DO YOU think we are – professionals or something?" No, but there are those who think that violence is golden, and that the Femmes have rusted. But not tonight.

Two-and-a-half hours after the initial blast of "Country Death Song", the Femmes' polished, if unkempt, freight train of mania was still on the tracks, stampeding over the sleepers, and colliding with the drunken throng. The band that made Milwaukee famous produce the perfect drunk set. They start with a flourish of excitement, flounder half-way, and end up slumped over a bar in alcoholic oblivion. As The Femmes leapt into the rafters, the audience hit the roof. As the Femmes spent half an hour of straight gospel bleeding for Jesus, the audience opened their veins. As the Femmes argued with one another about which song to play, the audience got another round in.

Although the word is out that the gleesome threesome are changing for the worse, Gordon Gano's stare remained fixed, his eyes double-glazed, the wrinkle on his brow spelling Out To Lunch. It is Gano's chilling lyrics and gnashing and grinding tonsils that still give the trio of misfits their bite – one part melody, three parts whooping melodrama.

There are those who believe the Femmes have a monopoly on sardonic irony. But not tonight. Throughout the sing-along-a-Jesus ballads it was impossible to tell irony from an ironing board – their humour is just too black to see in the dark. "Children Of The Revolution" was dispatched with gusto and reverence, just as "Black Girls" was delivered complete with drum solo, but without the bat of an eye, the tongue in a cheek. The Femmes are in-between daze: unconventional yet conformist, with one foot in the funny farm and the other entrenched in the Whitehouse lawn. Three steps from heaven, and a short stumble to the bar.

From "Special" to "No Killing", the Femmes' fat, shapely, though sharply focused barrage of rock'n'brawl became a pogoist's nirvana... until "Good Friend" (the borrowed) was unleashed and Lou Reed jumped out of the closet wearing nought but his underwear. The ballad coupled New York underground tragedy with a hungover remorse that gently drifted into snippets of seedy Reed's "Sweet Jane". It may have been a parody. It may have been an apology. It was no excuse.

The Femmes' fat, shapely barrage of rock'n'brawl became a pogoist's nirvana

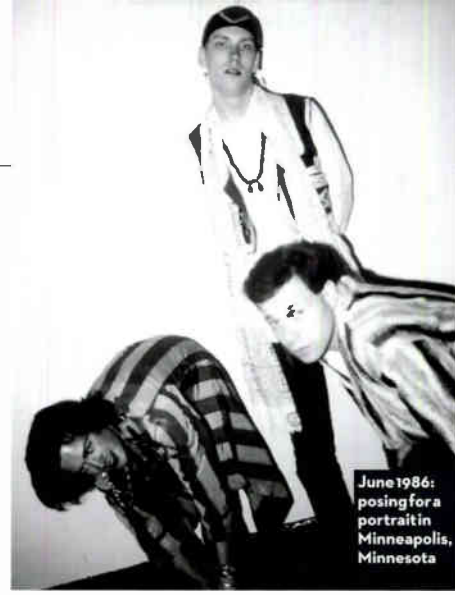
Yet the bible-belters wouldn't belt up, instead issuing sermons camouflaged with guitar resonance and bolstered with a cavalry charge of bass and drums. Chaos and chorus danced cheek to cheek through "Gone Daddy Gone" until both tripped over "Blister In The Sun". Suddenly and quite effortlessly, the trio sidled into "Whiter Shade Of Pale" only to find their instruments fizzled before the climax – too much drink!

"That was the first time in five years we've missed a cue," explained Gano. After five minutes of recrimination, the band launched (or rather lurched) into tatters of Ramones and a scrapbook history of British music from "Satisfaction" to "Daydream Believer". It might have been a nightmare, but not tonight. It was just a symptom of the Femmes' retreat from a reality they once had such a vice-like grip around.

"We think this is a pub gig not a real gig." The crowd were not real people, "Purple Haze" wasn't real Jimi, only the confusion was real enough.

"I think we're tripping into masturbation here..." by which time the ale-drenched were already head over heels in love. Some people might call the group wankers, but the truth is they're just too used to playing with themselves. Sometime after the cartoon cabaret collapsed, "Blister In The Sun" resurfaced. By this time night had become morning, and nothing made sense – except another Pils.

The Violent Femmes are certainly changing: a band that was once on the warpath are now completely off the reservation. *Ted Mico*


June 1986: posing for a portrait in Minneapolis, Minnesota

"So what's so bad about that? From the two reviews we've had of *The Blind Leading The Naked* [the new Femmes album], it seems that the writers are expecting or wanting something weirder – that's interesting. They only label us weird because they don't know how to label us, and that seems the most readily available tag to put on the thing – here's this weirdo band from Milwaukee who play gospel music and then sing about fucking.

"We don't mind," Victor smirks. "With that title, we can go any direction we want, we don't have to marry any certain kind of thing."

But I'd be happier hearing their festering version of Bolan's "Children Of The Revolution" on *The Breakfast Show* alongside Duran Duran than tucked away with Captain Beefheart around midnight on Peel.

The hippy-who-isn't laughs: "I think we'd rather be with Captain Beefheart than Duran Duran, actually."

Evidently, and yet even these Femmes, intent on maintaining freedom with utmost integrity, have been forced to take compromise into their scheme of things. Whereas their first album was a high-school nightmare of psychotic skiffle and hi-jinks dorm depression and their second, *Hallowed Ground*, was located in the eerie claustrophobia and incest of the Appalachians of *Deliverance*, *The Blind Leading The Naked* stalks its obsessions through the more familiar terrain of clubland R'n'B.

> "There's all different levels of total contradiction going on"

Apparently Slash, the Femmes' American company, were so dismayed by what they considered the perverse twist of *Hallowed Ground* that, at one point, they were refusing to release it. *The Blind Leading The Naked* encountered no such resistance, produced as it was, in a more orthodox manner, by Talking Head Jerry Harrison.

I'd have thought that was the last thing they needed, being hitched to the coat-tails of the world's most acceptable oddball band.

"Well, we were extremely paranoid," admits Ritchie. "We made a list of about 20 possible producers and Jerry was one of the only ones we definitely didn't want."

But he lived in Milwaukee, and when they met he was more amenable than expected.

"Jerry was fantastic," continues Ritchie, "because he was able to go with any idea we came up with and also show us ways to improve that had never occurred to us. The guy is a Harvard graduate, after all."

"Sometimes he got a little excitable," Gano grins. "Like when he's taking sips outta this tiny little bottle and I take a look and it says 'For External Use Only' on the label."

"But you can't help love a guy who shaves his legs," says Victor.

"Well, maybe you can't!"

Gano's cackling.

Aside from the extracurricular entertainments, Harrison also played on ...*The Naked* and helped attract passing luminaries like Fred Frith and Leo Kottke, snaring them into studio jams, a dangerous pastime the Femmes have always employed to keep their stuff on the edge.

"D'you know how we can get in touch with Rick Wakeman? Victor asks after interrogation time.

I tell him to leave it out, Wakeman's a wanker.

Victor's obviously taken aback: "What? He played on a Bowie record! We want him to play with us. Is he unfashionable or something?"

Somewhat.

"Why?"

Well, apart from Yes and *The Myths And Legends Of King Arthur* and *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth*, he's reputed to have threatened to leave A&M if they signed the Sex Pistols.

"Hey!" Victory grins. "He sounds just our man!"

Chary or childlike? I wonder.

Certainly, I'm prepared to go along with the Femmes' argument that ...*The Naked* is conventional because they don't feel they need to be unconventional just to satisfy our appraisal of their rock'n'roll, but it's a bit of a Picasso situation – there's this scribble, seemingly calculated to the precise line, and yet a four-year-old could do it unconsciously.

Where do the Femmes fit?

"We're self-conscious and aware of what we're doing, but the innocence comes in not imposing limitations upon ourselves. A child is the most innocent thing – that's why a child will walk out in the street or fall down the stairs. We're willing to do those kind of things – not that we don't know what we're doing, it's just that we're not afraid to do it."

Gano smiles at Ritchie's suave conceit.

"Childlike, minimalistic – it doesn't make any sense to me to think in those terms."

Gano's chuffed and chuckling. In Australia, he'd been told by a fan his lyrics were brilliant because they didn't make any sense. Another had assumed every word poured forth from a soul tortured by precisely the same hang-ups as the poor student suffered himself.

"Generally, I think of songs as having a life of their own, and if somebody comes up to me and asks, 'What does this song mean?', I always wanna know what they think it means.

"Sometimes they might tell me something I might not have thought of before, but I still think that's valid. We'll do a show and somebody'll say, 'I don't understand. You do a gospel song and it seems like you mean it and then you say some things that sound anti-Reagan. How does this go together? Which is being serious and which is being ironic?'"

"As if Reagan is the voice of God!" howls Ritchie.

"Oh wow! WOW!"

OK, ACCEPTING VIOLENT Femmes songs as mirrors to our own prejudices still doesn't account for their precarious balance, wobbling between opinion and observation. Their stuff's so simple and yet so live, as if Gano employs cliche solely to attack the songs themselves. This religious business, for example...

"OK, it's interesting you bring that up, because as far as my songwriting goes, that's the least ironic aspect. English journalists – I've never met a breed so thoroughly convinced that the religious songs, the songs gospel in nature, are just total sarcasm. They almost congratulate me, thinking how nifty I've been, but they're wrong. It comes from the heart."

And sex? If your sex songs come from your heart, you must be well frustrated.

"Well, it would probably be bad for my reputation if I wasn't to go along with that. I've had my share of that, yeah, but a lot of people do. For the sex songs, I listen to a lot of Prince records and that gets me into the vibe."

I don't believe him.

"No, really, I don't think that a song, to be honest, to have impact, to be emotionally sincere, has to be a page torn out of a diary. And yet, sometimes, I'm brought to remember how much of my songs are things in my life."

Gano's beginning to sound like Sir Andrew Eldritch, so I guess this is as good a time as any to plunge into the heart of (what's) the matter (?). Femmes songs are confrontational not through their stance but because they're undecided. Femmes' songs are self-flagellation, forged in the moment, hence their emotional swings.

"I write like that. I don't walk around all day thinking about something, then sit down and write what I've already thought out. My creative process is very unpremeditated."

Is that why there's so much guilt and paranoia in your songs, because you're stealing royalties from a devil sitting on your shoulder?

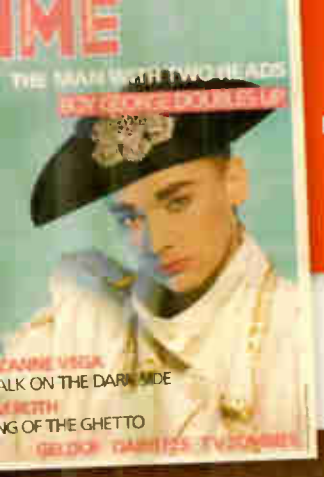
"Good point," yells Ritchie. "You should donate the publishing to some mystical foundation, the Theosophists or something like that."

"Look, if somebody's got a reason to be paranoid, do you still call them paranoid? If somebody's paranoid because they think everybody's out to get them, what if everybody is out to get that person? Is that paranoia?

"Look, I gotta go now, I gotta let some of these fears slip, I gotta focus again. No, I don't really think of myself as a paranoid person; fearful but not paranoid."

And with that I commend Gano's songs to your neuroses and his soul to St Peter. Amen. *Steve Sutherland* •

JIM STEINFELD / GETTY



1986

APRIL – JUNE

BIG AUDIO DYNAMITE, THE SMITHS, GEORGE MICHAEL AND MORE

WILL PLAY

Hostile dispute

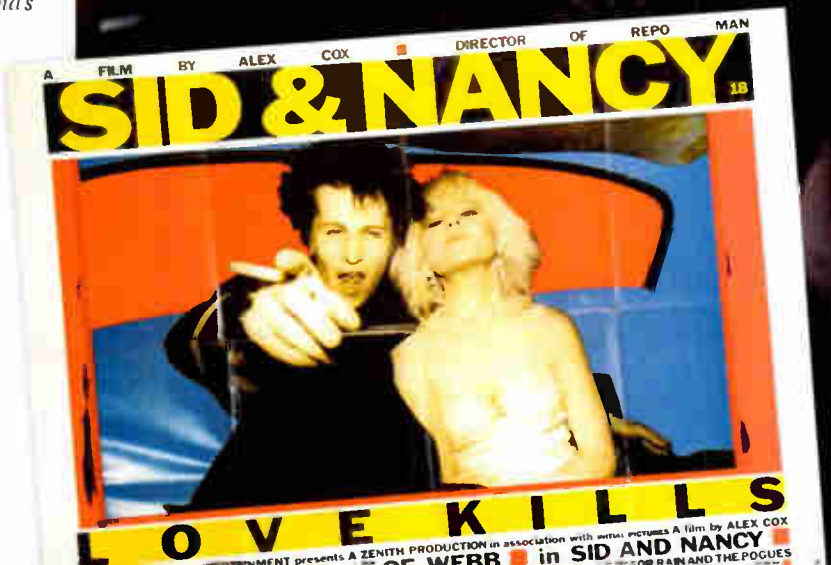
NME APR 5 A new film about Sid Vicious is said to enrage John Lydon.

SID AND NANCY: Love Kills, Alex Cox's feature film on the life and death of Sid Vicious, has apparently entered a new phase of controversy. According to those proverbial "sources close to the film", Cox, who directed last year's cult film *Repo Man*, is involved in a public and increasingly hostile dispute with John Lydon, who has never disguised his hatred for the Sid film.

The tension between Cox and Lydon increased recently when the legal rights to the Sex Pistols' back catalogue passed from Malcolm McLaren to the ex-members of the group. The court decision effectively gave Lydon a much more forceful say in how the music could be used, and therefore what measures could be taken against Cox's film.

Immediately, rumours circulated that key scenes showing the Pistols performing "Anarchy In The UK" on the notorious Thames boat trip might have to be removed. But apparently all rights were legally sealed before Lydon could object and attention has now turned to *England's Glory*, a half-hour promotional short on the making of *Sid And Nancy*.

Allegedly, owing to an oversight, musical clearance had not been extended to cover the short film, and Lydon may now have the ammunition he needs. *England's Glory*, a humorous and outrageous parody of the conventional promo film, is hosted by actor David Hayman, as a coke-snorting Glaswegian terrorist en route to Nicaragua. It is quite unlike the normal sycophantic films that generally accompany major features, and director Alex Cox and Malcolm McLaren are the major targets for its cynicism. Lydon may well be on a fool's errand, trying to silence a film that satirises the man he loves to hate.



SNAP STILLS / REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

"You can't arrest me, I'm a rock star": Gary Oldman and Chloe Webb in Alex Cox's *Sid & Nancy*

1986

APRIL – JUNE

Sigue Sigue Sputnik's Tony James (left) and Martin Degville at the Royal Albert Hall on October 13, 1986

"Revolutionising record marketing"

MM JUN 7 Sell out! Sigue Sigue Sputnik's album will feature adverts.

SIGUE SIGUE SPUTNIK score another first this week with the announcement that they are to sell advertising space on their debut album.

The album, *Flaunt It*, will feature eight commercials spliced between the music. The Sputniks intend to recoup the cost of making their records with advertising revenue. They have already approached companies in Europe, the USA and Japan, and are currently considering eight ads per territory.

Tony James – who was still sworn to secrecy about the album when the *Maker* tracked him down in Ibiza – said that this new approach to record marketing was a direct result of the group's interest in all forms of technology.

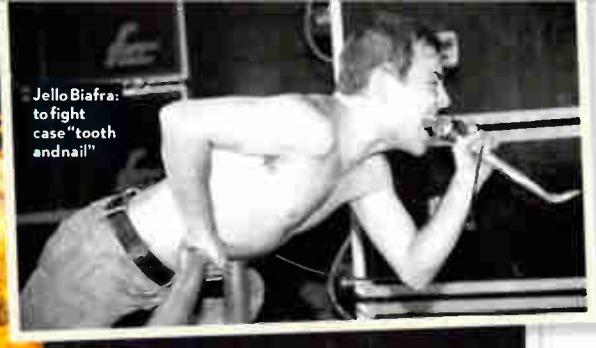
The Sputniks will only accept adverts for products that they themselves would use. They believe the idea will "drastically change the record industry".

Advertisers include fashion magazine *i-D*, cellular radio specialists ECT Cellular, a computer games company, and EMI Records, who are currently working on their own advert.

The group are expecting other bands to follow their lead in "revolutionising record marketing" and believe this will cause record prices to drop.

Sigue Sigue Sputnik embark on a full-scale tour, already announced, on July 3 at Southampton. The album is due out in July.

PETER STILL, ULLSTEIN BILD, INDEPENDENT NEWS AND MEDIA / GETTY (3)



Jello Biafra: to fight case "tooth and nail"

"Harmful matter"

MM JUNE 21 Dead Kennedys LP contains a controversial insert.

DEAD KENNEDYS VOCALIST Jello Biafra faces a year in prison if he is found guilty of obscenity charges being brought against him. Biafra and his label Alternative Tentacles Records are being taken to court by the parents of a 17-year-old girl in Los Angeles who bought their latest album, *Frankenchrist*.

The album contains a free poster, "Penis Landscape" by Swiss artist HR Giger, who designed film sets for *Alien* and *Poltergeist* I and II. Giger also designed record sleeves for Debbie Harry and ELP (*Brain Salad Surgery*).

Biafra says the charge of "distributing harmful matter to minors" is the direct result of "a national power play from America's religious right-wingers against rock bands and their music that dates to the McCarthy era."

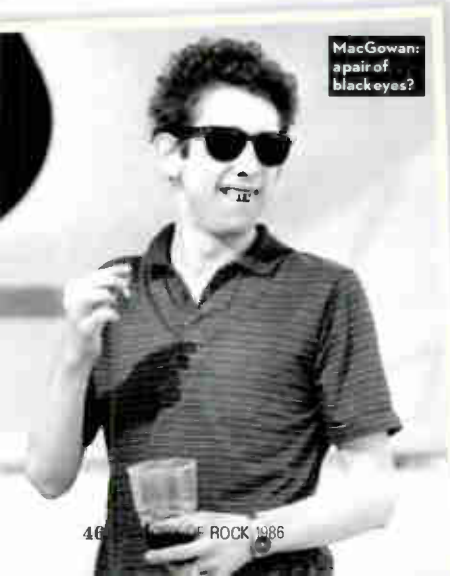
He has vowed to "fight the case tooth and nail" when it comes to court on July 3.

The Dead Kennedys are being supported by Frank Zappa and his organisation for the abolition of censorship in rock music in the case, which has received national TV and newspaper coverage in America.

"A lot worse than we thought"

NME APR 5 Pogues lead singer Shane MacGowan has a bad accident.

SHANE MACGOWAN, LEAD singer of The Pogues, was rushed to hospital last Friday night following a serious road accident. MacGowan was hit by a taxi cab as he was about to get into a car in Westbourne Grove, thrown into the air and left unconscious on the pavement. In hospital, he was found to have multiple injuries, including a fractured arm, facial cuts requiring stitches and severe damage to ligaments in one leg. Following an operation on Sunday, his arm and leg are now in plaster, and it is expected he will be in hospital for at least another week.



MacGowan: a pair of black eyes?

The Pogues – riding high after a triumphant American tour and the recent "Poguetry In Motion" hit – had just finished recording a batch of songs for the forthcoming *Sid & Nancy* film. MacGowan had been to a restaurant with director Alex Cox, who had previously made the acclaimed "A Pair Of Brown Eyes" video, and as the two were heading home after the meal, the accident occurred.

According to a spokesman for Stiff Records, MacGowan "is a lot worse than we initially thought and could be laid up for quite a long time. He'll be in hospital for a while, then in plaster for 10 weeks, and after that there'll be physiotherapy to try and repair the damaged knee."

The Pogues have been forced to cancel their forthcoming tours of Germany and France, where ticket demand has been such that the French dates have been sold out for weeks.

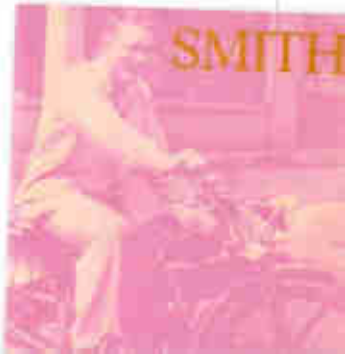
The Smiths' bassist quits

NME APR 19 Andy Rourke to be replaced by Ex-Aztec Camera man.

JUST WEEKS BEFORE The Smiths release their new LP *The Queen Is Dead*, bass player Andy Rourke has left the group. His replacement is Craig Gannon, one-time member of Aztec Camera and a well-known session musician. Neither The Smiths nor Rourke would make any comment on the split, which had been rumoured for some time.

Meanwhile, the group release a new single, "Bigmouth Strikes Again" (Rough Trade), on May 16. The B-side is a Marr instrumental called "Money Changes Everything" and the 12-inch also includes another original, "Unloveable".

On 20 May, The Smiths play the *Whistle Test* live.



SHRINK RAP!

JOEY & DEE DEE

MM APR 26

Ramones singer and bassist on the Maker couch.

Joey (left): "sweater meat" Dee Dee: "I'll flap my meat"

1976

DEE DEE: We were happening then. We useta come over here and play, and then we'd go back and play CBGB's. We played there a lotta times, hundreds of times. It was great playing there, being darling of the underground. In fact, we're the scene now. We play Madison Square Garden quite regular, and The Meadowlands, Giants Stadium, Nassau Coliseum...

JOEY: It was the birth of punk rock, our first album came out, we came over here and kicked off the whole punk movement, basically. Kids came to our soundcheck at Dingwalls and told us that hearing "Blitzkrieg Bop" was sort of a call to arms for them to form their own band.

Designer jeans

JOEY: Gloria Vanderbilt, Fiorucci. They look good on girls.

DEE DEE: I only wear Levi's, the punk-rock jeans. I wear straight-leg Levi's with a button-fly. Those designer jeans, the young girls like to see the bulge in your pants.

The Beastie Boys

JOEY: I dunno. What about 'em? They're nice guys.

DEE DEE: They got a white funk sound. They're good. They know Madonna.

Forest Hills, New York

DEE DEE: A lovely place if you're Jewish, and I am Jewish. I'd like to say "Oy gevalt" to all my friend in the Yeshiva temple.

JOEY: I don't like Forest Hills. My mom lives in a welfare centre down on Hudson Street.

DEE DEE: My mother begs for quarters and shows her ass to people.

Moscow

DEE DEE: I'd love to go there and go to the ballet. I'm gonna go over with my own money, and go to Leningrad. I love the Russians - they're so like Americans, it's all greed, greed, greed and take, take, take. I'd love to take a Russian girl home and let her see my 10-inch erection.

JOEY: After I saw that Elton John video, I made up my mind I have to go.

Crewcuts

DEE DEE: Good when you're in the army, and you listen to country & western. I useta have a flat-top in '67, when all the hippies were around.

JOEY: They're alright.

Amphetamines

JOEY: Speedy.

DEE DEE: I think all drugs are really bad for people. Kids shouldn't take those damn things, especially in England. We useta take them, but we don't any more.

Tommy And Marky

DEE DEE: Mark is well now. He cracked up. He went on the welcome wagon, constantly welcoming people. Like, people would move into town, and he would go, "Welcome." He stopped getting on the welcome wagon, and he went on the wagon, and now he just welcomes British people, who go and welcome him, and he pulls his dick out and shakes it at people.

JOEY: I like Marky. Both names end in a "y".

Glamour

JOEY: Sweater meat.

DEE DEE: If Joey said "sweater meat," I do too. Whatever he does, I do.

Deborah Harry

DEE DEE: She's a little old now, and she doesn't look too good, but she'd do. She's a nice piece of ass.

JOEY: What can you say about her? *Videodrome*. That lets me off the hook.

DEE DEE: If you want to see something nice, look at Deborah Harry in her panties and bra.

The State Of Pop

JOEY: Sad. Pathetic.

The Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame

JOEY: It's a great idea. I think it's gonna be in Cleveland, because there's nothing else there. They're gonna have some kind of shrine. They don't even have Swingos [rock'n'roll hotel] in Cleveland any more.

DEE DEE: If there are any groupies in Cleveland, don't tell me. I'll unbutton my fly and start flapping my meat. I'm gonna do it. I'll flap my meat.

Debbie Harry: "she'd do"

Colonel Gadaffi

DEE DEE: Reagan's a good guy, but Joey knows more about Gadaffi.

JOEY: He's gotta be snuffed out.

Immaturity

JOEY: Beating off.

DEE DEE: Flapping your meat. Wang-tang-poop-dang. Shitting on the floor, that's immaturity.

GARY GERSHOFF, FRANS SCHELLEKENS, RON GALELLA, LTD. / GETTY (3)

"Too many people, too many problems"

NME JUN 28

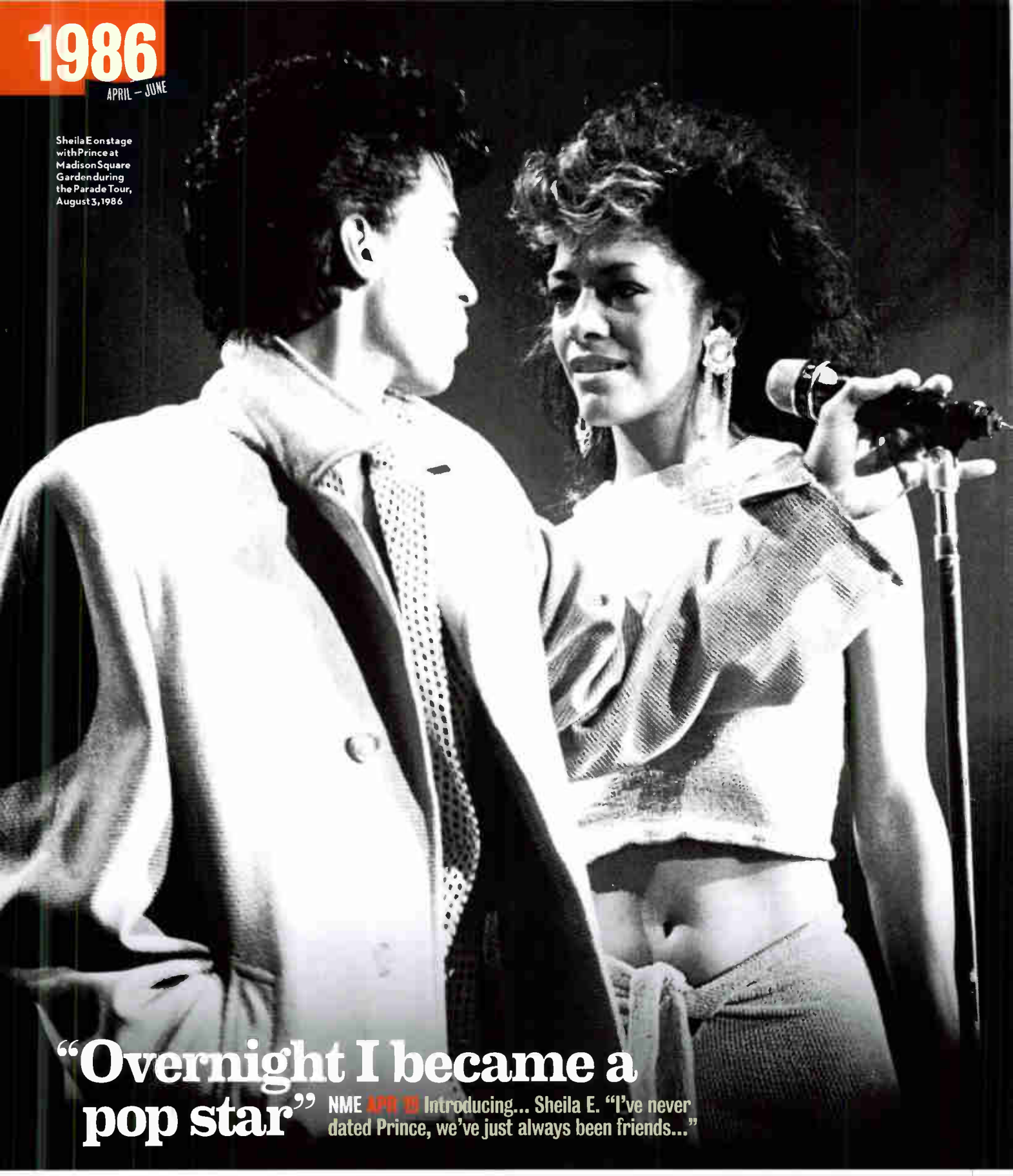
Is the game up for the Glastonbury festival? And what of Reading?

THIS YEAR'S GLASTONBURY Festival may have been the last, but the Reading rockfest is poised for a comeback. The Glastonbury promoter, Michael Eavis, said after the three-day event: "There are too many people, and too many problems." Eavis had a licence for 55,000 festival-goers, but gate-crashers and other unexpected arrivals put the attendance last weekend to closer to 100,000, which may have cost the festival its future. CND will be anxious, if this is the case, for the event raises more for the anti-nuclear organisation in three days than it can get in the rest of the year.

Reports that the Reading Festival will be back in action this August after a two-year absence have been described by the festival's organisers as "premature". The absence of Britain's longest-running rock festival was caused by the Tory-controlled Reading Council requisitioning the fest's traditional site for redevelopment and making it clear that the event was no longer welcome in the town. But Labour gained control of the council in the spring elections, and earlier this month invited the promoter to reactivate the event.

Whether that can happen this year depends on a suitable site being found (the former camping area is under consideration) and being able to contract bands at such short notice.

GOODBYE TO GLASTONBURY? HELLO, READING...



Sheila E on stage with Prince at Madison Square Garden during the Parade Tour, August 3, 1986

GARY GERSHOFF / GETTY

"Overnight I became a pop star"

NME APR 19 Introducing... Sheila E. "I've never dated Prince, we've just always been friends..."

WHEN THE WHEELS of celebrity are set in motion, the limousine windows are tainted; bystanders can see in, but the star is blinded to life outside.

From wake-up time (4am) to airport departure time (7pm) Sheila E-is-for-energy spends her day burbling, smiling and miming the star game. Accompanied by her managerial assistant, image consultant and bodyguard, she makes the round of radio, press and TV, stopping only to have her face repainted or her hair immaculately ruffled.

Sheila's reality is one of limitless ambition and career absorption. Celebrity has haunted her from her adolescence; it was only a matter of time until she succumbed to its charms. An all-American girl, she first enjoyed adulation for her displays of physical prowess.

"Either I was going to be in the Olympics or be a musician. I ran a lot of track and I played soccer for eight or nine years and broke several records. But I played drums with my father when I was 15 and I got a standing ovation from the crowd. I thought, 'Whooah! What is this?' I just felt I'm going to play music."

Sheila E-is-for-Escovedo became an attraction, alongside her father Pete "Coke" Escovedo, as a percussionist playing Latin jazz in California and South America. Throughout the '70s, she was an in-demand session player. In 1978, at an Al Jarreau show in Oakland, she was introduced to a thin, mysterious guy who was beginning to cause a stir writing, playing,

singing and producing his own material. Prince Nelson Rodgers was evidently attracted to the idea of a timbale-thumping, curvaceous female mixing Latin jazz, funk and pop. It was as individual and as radical a rearrangement of the image firmament as his own star-crossed odyssey of rock music and heavy funk, Sly Stone and Little Richard. And, even in her patent stilettoes, Sheila E-is-for-erotic didn't tower over the purple dwarf.

"Sometimes when we're recording we watch the clock and switch off when it's getting too long. What happened with 'A Love Bizarre' was that the beat was so good, we just went on and on because it felt right."

Twelve minutes of breathless bump and slow grind, salacious intimations and precocious fantasy, "A Love Bizarre" is her reactivated duet with Prince, ostensibly the reason for her visit and one of the few real stormers on Sheila's two flawed LPs.

"We wrote the song on the Purple Rain Tour; most of the time we're together is spent writing. Backstage he usually has a piano, so he'll get an idea and then I'll switch on the drum machine. That one came together very quickly."

Ask Sheila her definition of a Love Bizarre and she can't relate to the song's rude ridicule; she gets girlish giggly, rolls her eyes, looks at the floor, hums and hahs.

"I'd say it gets quite rough in the back of a limousine, which is a quote from the song."

Is the song personal experience – were you dating Prince when you wrote it?

"I've never dated Prince, we've just always been friends, real close."

Sheila E-is-for-in-earnest dedicates her records to God, but she's on the other end of the latest moral battering ram against sexually explicit music.

"What I'm doing is talking about what I want to talk about. I mean, it's a free country and if people don't like it they don't have to listen to it. I'm not saying things that nobody else is doing. Everybody is in love, has sex, it's just an everyday thing and there's nothing bad about it. If it wasn't for God making Adam and Eve and them having sex, then none of us would be here."

Is sex God's greatest gift?

"Maybe, it could be. Hey, that's a good answer – I'm going to use that."

The schedule is running late, but Sheila has a way of allaying grouchy journalists. She's a personable and perfumed presence, her features are strikingly pretty but the face is unnecessarily made up. We sit close, on high stools in a bar, deserted but for the photographer and Sheila's unobtrusive, lifelong friend and bodyguard Frank. At times these trappings of fame seem to have been forced on her very quickly.

"Overnight I became a pop star in many people's eyes, but I'm not, I'm a musician, not a lot of people know that. When I played Latin jazz it was different. I'd sit down and play with other musicians and I didn't usually sing, but now I have to go out and sing. I've never really done it before and I should practise, more but there isn't time."

And projecting an image, does that interest her?

"It's not that it does or doesn't interest me, it's just that it's part of my life now. I dress differently at different times and I can't go to certain places because I'll get mobbed. There's just some things I can't do any more, but I don't mind."

Her father, still a source of advice and assistance, schooled her in the greats of Latin music. On record, attempts to merge this heritage with Paisley pop have often been confusing rather than a successful hybrid, but Sheila is anxious to keep the faith.

"I'm bringing it more into my music now. Live, I'm playing a lot more jazz in my set. I'm changing it gradually – what I want to do next year is record a whole Latin-jazz LP without any singing."

"I liked playing behind other artists, because there wasn't any responsibility"

She's conscious of her position of prestige in Latin music, though maybe her drive for fame means forsaking the purists.

"I'm quite unusual; there's maybe three women popular in Latin music in the States but not that many female percussionists, and certainly none that are fronting a band. Before I got too busy I used to teach other women to play. I still get calls from women who've just started and want to be like me."

For years as a session player with Lionel Richie, Diana Ross and Marvin Gaye on his final Midnight Love Tour, Sheila shunned the limelight. Even now her reluctance still surfaces.

"I liked playing behind other artists, because there wasn't any pressure or responsibility, all you have to do is sit back there and do what you're supposed to. Being upfront can really be a lot of pressure. Sometimes I'll look back at the group and think, 'God, all these people are staring at me and I feel real stupid.'"

It was Prince who persuaded her to sing where Richie, her father and others had failed. In Paisley Park, as in the film *Krush Groove* which features Sheila E-is-for-everywhere, artists are readymade stars, all bearing traces of their regal mastermind's clothes, imagery and music. Sheila is now one of the veteran acolytes on a label whose prolific output responds to America's need for ever more celebrities.

"I think America does revolve around celebrities, they're looked up to. Like USA For Africa, you couldn't get a bunch of steelworkers or people who worked in construction to go and say, 'Let's get some food for the hungry.' It has to be somebody people respect, and right now that's mostly musicians."

Sheila E-is-for-éclat speaks with the smug, unintentional superiority of The Chosen Ones; the fame bubble that keeps her locked in a recording studio for 24 hours at a time also keeps her anaesthetised. She recently visited fascist-run, CIA-backed Chile and spent her time, when not on stage, trapped in a hotel room with 2000 fans screaming outside night and day. But the country's political backdrop didn't worry Sheila; she was just flattered that so many of the audience knew the words and could hum the melodies of her tunes. But where does it all lead, this life of frenzied activity and gratification?

"It's not really the glamorous life, it's real hard work. If you want to be involved with everything like I do, and make all my own decisions, that means I'm not going to get any sleep. You have to keep dreaming and have ambitions or else you just don't get anywhere, you just get stagnated. I believe you should try and reach goals and keep life interesting."

But celebrity needs a flamboyant purpose or a cauterising edge, otherwise it becomes another useless by-product of capitalism. I'm not sure that reluctant girl star Sheila E-is-for-effulgence has grasped this or whether she's merely basking in the vanity of the glorious reflection.

What do you dislike most about America?

Sheila gives me an incredulous, quavering look.

"Dislike about America?"

That's what I said.

"Nothing."

Aw, come on...

"No, I like America."

There must be something.

"No, I like everything.'

People, some of them, must annoy you.

"No, I like everyone."

Blissfully bland in The All-American state of grace that is celebrity, Sheila's E may be for excitement, electric and effervescent, but look a little further and you'll find E is for empty-headed, too.

(With thanks to John Lahr's *Notes On Fame*.) *Gavin Martin*

"We're a product of London today"

"The idea is to do the business on three or four different levels," says BIG AUDIO DYNAMITE man MICK JONES. "To be a rock'n'roll band, to make good records, to be a proper live band and to reach the dancefloors as well,

— MELODY MAKER APRIL 26 —

"WHAT WE NEED is love." Mick Jones' goofy grin confronts me across the table and I gulp. Now this I hadn't expected. Was he having me on? Were the funny cigarettes talking? Could this be the self-same BAD I'd assumed would spout a creed to suit their gangster gear?

I double-check for a wry smile, some sign that it's a wind-up. I get nothing but Don Letts nodding his approval so, I do all I can, sit back and let these two big guns go for it.

"I haven't heard about love for a while and I think, nowadays, when you live in the city, it's all such a rush that you forget about the spiritual side of yourself, the bit that actually keeps you together. I mean, we don't have to do a lot – we just have to lead peaceful existences, right? I'm spiritually weak but I think it's because of the environment. I can't imagine it in my own home but I think if we all could, if we were all really peaceful in our homes, then there would be mass peace," says Jones, wide-eyed. Letts nods, bushy-tailed.

Sounds alarmingly naive and idyllic to me.

"Well, it's really difficult. I go to a gig and I ask myself, 'How can I love these people?' I just look at them and I think, 'My god, this is a really difficult job.' But at least I acknowledge that within myself, at least I'm thinking about it, admitting my weakness."

And this lapsed humanist with a cheeky leer knows exactly who's to blame for our fall from grace.

"The media is a lot to blame for... WAR. Although bad things happen, maybe we should have a paper that doesn't have all that stuff in it, that only has good news. It probably wouldn't sell a single copy, which is shit, innit?" »

LAWRENCE WATSON

Mick Jones and Don Letts in 1986: aiming for "a spiritual success as well as a material one" with Big Audio Dynamite

All manner of thoughts clamour to mock his idealism, any number of paranoias scream about Big Brother and the selective doctoring of news to opiate the people, but as I glance up from my typewriter, what do I see? *The Sun*'s headline, "Thrilled To Blitz" and "Gadaffi Baby Killed" and I think, 'What needs to be done needs to be done, but why glory in it? Why seek to justify what any sane person would consider a shocking, if necessary, act by pumping it full of jingoistic fervour?' Oh yes, I laughed alright, but the laughter was hollow.

"It's a bit frightening, because the only people going round saying 'peace and love' are your born-again Christians, and they're all a bit scary, know what I mean? You ain't sure where they're coming from, although you do know that they're in connection with The Mothers Of Prevention and upcoming censorship issues. I don't think we need any outside censorship force, although I would like to see all the groups censor themselves, or at least show some signs of responsibility – then there wouldn't be any need for those kinds of people to come in and start stomping all over everything and saying what should and shouldn't be.

"But no, it won't happen because the media keep selling their newspapers and it hasn't been associated with any glamorous group since The Beatles did 'All You Need Is Love' on a live satellite across the world with whoever the leader of the Russians was and Ford... or whoever it was."

It's true that, in the great pop equation, peace hasn't been a pretty sight for some time now. Reduced through commercial concerns to a fashion and harnessed to a long-haired, dope-smoking, idiot-dancing sloth, it lost its credibility – and that, as any cool dude can read in *The Face*, is what pop is all about. Being positive just can't match smashing up hotel rooms for excitement, and I mean, even Milton had trouble making God as groovy as the up-'n'-at-'em Satan in *Paradise Lost*.

But OK, so what if pop isn't a mature enough medium to deal with anything more important than the veneer of acquired attitudes? What if it is just an action/reaction cycle? Well, the rebel is rock's biggest hero and he sure stuffed peace when it became bloated and boring, so maybe it is time that punky Joe down the King's Road got turned over by some nouveau hippy togged up like a dandy. Maybe style and samaritanism, cool and caring, could become synonymous again. Designer pacifism, anybody?

Certainly, Live Aid, Sound Waves and the burgeoning benefit circuit suggests there's a shift towards benevolence even if, as yet, the support's there without its own suitable songs to match. Could BAD, with their astute sense of the zeitgeist, turn out to be the first big peace'n'love band since The Beatles?

"Well, I think the most brilliant thing that's happening to pop music is Bob Geldof going in and just saying the same things over and over again until people heard him. He was saying one thing and one thing alone – that there's all these people fuckin' starving. That, to me, is the greatest act of this decade and I love the geezer for it."

There are some, though, who still don't understand. In a recent particularly imbecilic piece in *Sounds*, some hack attacked BAD for not being hard enough, utterly failing to comprehend that, while the rebel without a cause needs the stigma of the bad-boy loner as a sign of his superiority, the rebel with a cause craves mass appeal. So, just as Sigue Sigue Sputnik are a come-all pastiche of the rebel stance, a deliberately easily accessible outrage designed to sell to newlyweds in the suburbs, so BAD are tailored to appeal – an inclusive rather than exclusive rock group.

Still, though, the confusions come thick and fast, probably because two of BAD's prime exponents were instrumental in exposing and destroying the hippies – Jones with The Clash and Letts with his enthusiastic support of the punk rock movement, captured through his camera.

"Well, we weren't really the nihilistic branch, Jones says of The Clash. "Necrophilia wasn't our thing. What we were interested in then, and what I'm still interested in, are ideas and life itself. What I've learned is to enjoy my life now – I think that's the most important thing you can do. What was exciting about punk was that it was outside the control of the record companies, and it wasn't negativity that made it outside, it was its vitality."

Just as Jones is justifiably proud of putting one over on the companies who'd grown sated and safe on mediocrity, so he's adamant that BAD are in full control of their own destinies. He refers to CBS as "a benevolent auntie", much as the Sputniks treat EMI.

"Lots of people took the wrong aspects of punk, stuck a safety pin through their noses, started gobbing, all that. But there's even more No Future now than there ever was, yet the media got hold of the negative aspect of it at the time and did a job on it, so that was how we appeared.

"We never wanted to be associated with The Damned, because The Damned were dopey, d'you know what I mean? We didn't want nuffink to do with gobbing and all that. What was interesting and exciting about it was that the people there were a real creative force."

ANOTHER CAUSE FOR confusion is BAD's use of film and sound images in their records and videos, images which suggest, if anything, macho violence rather than brotherly love. "Medicine Show", for instance, features Clint Eastwood in his Man With No Name mode.

"Yeah, we don't need another Clint Eastwood, we don't need any more *Miami Vice*, but that track is about the gullibility of people and how the media sells them any old shit and they swallow it. You can take it on a double level, because you can say, 'Hold on a minute, are they saying that we buy any old shit and here's another load of old shit coming along?"

Well, are you?

"No, we like the idea of taking from the media and using it, taking what we want from it, what we like."

So you take the good, the bad and the ugly?

"Yeah, just because we don't like the Americanisation of Europe, the 7-11 on the corner, the McDonald's and the Kentucky Frieds, doesn't mean there aren't certain elements of style we do like, we're taking the piss outta them pretty often. Like, as far as I'm concerned, Clint Eastwood is a right-wing asshole who lives up a mountain in California somewhere, but he's good on the screen. I don't think it's too bad to be as glamorous as Clint Eastwood and to use that, but we certainly don't go around going, 'Yeah! Clint Eastwood is great!' We just take what's good about him and use it to our cause.

"See, we see what the media is, we see how they have made HATE and WAR the gods, the deity. You know what the laity is? The uninformed masses – they are a deity, the rest of us are a laity. What we have done is see what the media does and take back something from it to use against it."

As well as the crucial part they play in BAD's attack from within, these stolen snatches of movie lore are an escape from the straitjacket of formularised pop promo-making. Don Letts, maker of *The Punk Rock Movie* and many pioneering promos, shakes his

November 7, 1986: BAD's (l–r) Don Letts, Mick Jones and Leo Williams on *The Tube*

REX FEATURES

locks in disgust: "Video castrated the bollocks off rock'n'roll. When I started, I could do what I liked. I could experiment, but now the record companies tell you exactly what they want, what to do."

Videos today are made ruthlessly, with specific markets in mind, and it's a sign of jaded times when all the images are assembled either to appeal to nostalgia or to some cliched notion of the future. BAD, on the other hand, are crucially NOW. They have no conception of past, present or future, they exist for the moment.

"Yeah, that's what's so great about Nic Roeg, the way he presents time in his films. All of a sudden you're in the past and then you're in the future and the way you get from here to there is never really explained."

Jones, a self-confessed Time Bandit, has lifted substantial chunks of Roeg's most infamous works – *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, *Don't Look Now* and, specifically, *Insignificance* – for the video that accompanies "E = MC²", BAD's biggest hit so far. In fact, the song was written about the film and influenced it right down to the way it was cut.

"We're gonna release a remix," Jones chortles, "'Albert Einstein Meets The Human Beatbox'. We co-wrote a song with Einstein, actually – I much prefer to work with established professors than old, established musicians. The only thing is, he's only gonna be allowed to hold the beatbox, because he's not a good live performer."

I take it, then, with all this time-slipping going on, that BAD don't see themselves as the future of rock'n'roll.

"No. As soon as you say those sort of things, you lay yourself open and people start asking themselves, 'Well, are the group what they say they're about?' I'm speaking from past experience when I say that a lot of times you'll find, if a group says they're about something, they're about exactly the opposite."

Through this lack of respect for tradition, their pilfering and repriming of accepted sights and sounds, BAD are the closest we're about to come to something new, an active amalgam, confederates of the Beastie Boys (whose Def Jam label is releasing BAD in the States) and Sigue Sigue Sputnik, run, of course, by Jones' old mate Tony James. BAD, it seems, are one of the few outfits around with nothing but praise for the fifth-generation rock'n'rollers.

"All the other groups are jealous, aren't they," Jones sniggers. "They're all too busy living in the city, being jealous, not being peaceful enough. And I think what's gonna happen to those people is that their heads are gonna explode because they're living in a concrete jungle."

Um... yes, well, anyway... about the music...

"The idea is to do the business on three or four different levels – to be a rock'n'roll band, to be able to make good records, to be a proper live band and to reach the dancefloors as well, black and white. See, I see this band being formed, if not in fact, in spirit, on the dancefloor. The story is, as I was kicked out of The Clash, I went flying through the air and landed on a dancefloor in New York, and as I looked up, two dreads were in space, so I reeled 'em in and that's how we started, a dance band. That doesn't mean 'Dance, fuck everything else!', it's just another way we're going. We don't want to limit ourselves to any one thing – d'you know what I mean? – 'Oh, here come The Big Audio Disease with their Gothic following'"

Oddly enough, probably because Jones strikes neat guitar poses, BAD have been referred to as old-fashioned.

"Well, there are certain traditional aspects. I like Chuck Berry and Howling Wolf and Robert Johnson and I like Hoagy Carmichael – those things are great and they'll always be great. I can't say the same about fuckin' Nik Kershaw – I don't think that's ever gonna be great, I don't even think it's great now! So we take certain things from the past that we like, because history is important – if we don't know our history, how we gonna fuckin' learn anything?"

Does this perhaps explain why the three most exciting things happening in the British singles charts around these times are the brainchildren of three old punks – Jones, James and Lydon?

"Maybe," says Letts. "Certainly, there's no example for the young people to follow today – it's old man stuff. It's all gone back to what it was before punk came in. There's no risk-taking, they all fit nicely on the charts, they all fit in with the way Terry Wogan talks, they all fit in with the new horrific language which breaks everything down to the lowest common denominator and gets all our old people to believe it." Jones is off again. "It's the media! It all fits in with the reactionary government we live under."

In a way, perhaps, BAD's task is impossible; to reach mums and dads, sons and daughters without belonging to them, without *The Sun* making them public property and divesting them of their dignity?

"Ummmm... I think we can blame the '60s for a lot of this in terms of the way the media reported things, convincing people they'd never had it so good and that it was a most wonderful time, while Kissinger was getting the Nobel Peace Prize for bombing Cambodia and flattening Laos and handing it over to the Khmer Rouge."

Certainly, the media profile of an age can appear somewhat misleading on closer scrutiny. Like, there was a series of swinging never-had-it-so-good '60s movies on TV recently – *Poor Cow*, *Alfie*, etc – and they were all utterly depressing, obsessed with rape and abortion. Punk, too, was supposed to be shocking at the time, but in an amazingly hypocritical reversal, the same voices once raised against its outrage are now bemoaning the passing of its brutal energy. And the royalty too – Fleet Street would have us believe they're scared, but it's only since the First World War that the rags have treated the Windsors with any respect at all. Before that, royalty-baiting was fair game.

"Oh, *there's* a big love story," laughs Jones, referring to [engaged royal couple] Andy and Fergie. "But the trouble with that one is that it isn't glamorous enough; it isn't glamorous to the kids, it leaves the people nowhere. It's like 'Stuff The Jubilee', remember? It's exactly the same – 'Bollocks To The Wedding'. What they should do is take it to America, do it on London Bridge in Arizona and make a big HBO special."

I wonder if Jones is surprised that there hasn't yet been outright, wide-scale rebellion?

"Well, there's loads to react against, I dunno. What amazes me is how Thatcher can sit there on *Face The Press* or whatever and bare-faced lie about things, how she can go round offering people knighthoods if they stop talking about Sigue Sigue Sputnik. And she gets away with it because of all the media bludgeoning – people actually think that's what it's all about. It's almost as if they don't think any more."

So, what's BAD's notion of victory?

"Freedom to exercise our ideas, not necessarily a big bank account," says Letts. "A spiritual success as well as a material one."

"It's good if we go on *Top Of The Pops*, though," Jones adds, "because then realistically there's something else out there as well. It's good if we go on with those conventional acts, because I think we blow them off. I mean, how often do you see dreads looking like they've just come out of the casino? We're so used to seeing the stereotypical down-the-frontline type thing, but we've got a filmmaker and one who has his own Fort Knox full of our tapes – they're eminent, successful men, and I think it's good to show all those dreads out there, who people think are a bit hippyish or something, that they're not.

"Seriously, I think we should all take a great example from the way the honourable Bob Marley lived his life."

Letts agrees. When he first met Marley, he says he dressed as a white man and all his values were white and he felt kinda weird and unfulfilled. Then one night, he followed Marley's coach back to a hotel after a gig, sat in the corner for a while until he was noticed and then stayed talking till dawn.

"I was a changed man," he says. "I realised the ghetto wasn't what we were about, that we have a great heritage that actually goes back beyond a lot of western culture. Now I feel like a manifestation of my heritage."

"See?" Jones ribs me. "What's cool about Big Audio Dynamite is we've got Haile Selassie and Elvis Presley. We're a product of London today."

"People might not realise it from reading *The Sun*, but all black people aren't running around raping white women," says Letts. "And I think that's what's particularly special about this group – we share a background, we have shared common experience plus a completely different cultural heritage. I mean, we both know who Ena Sharples is!"

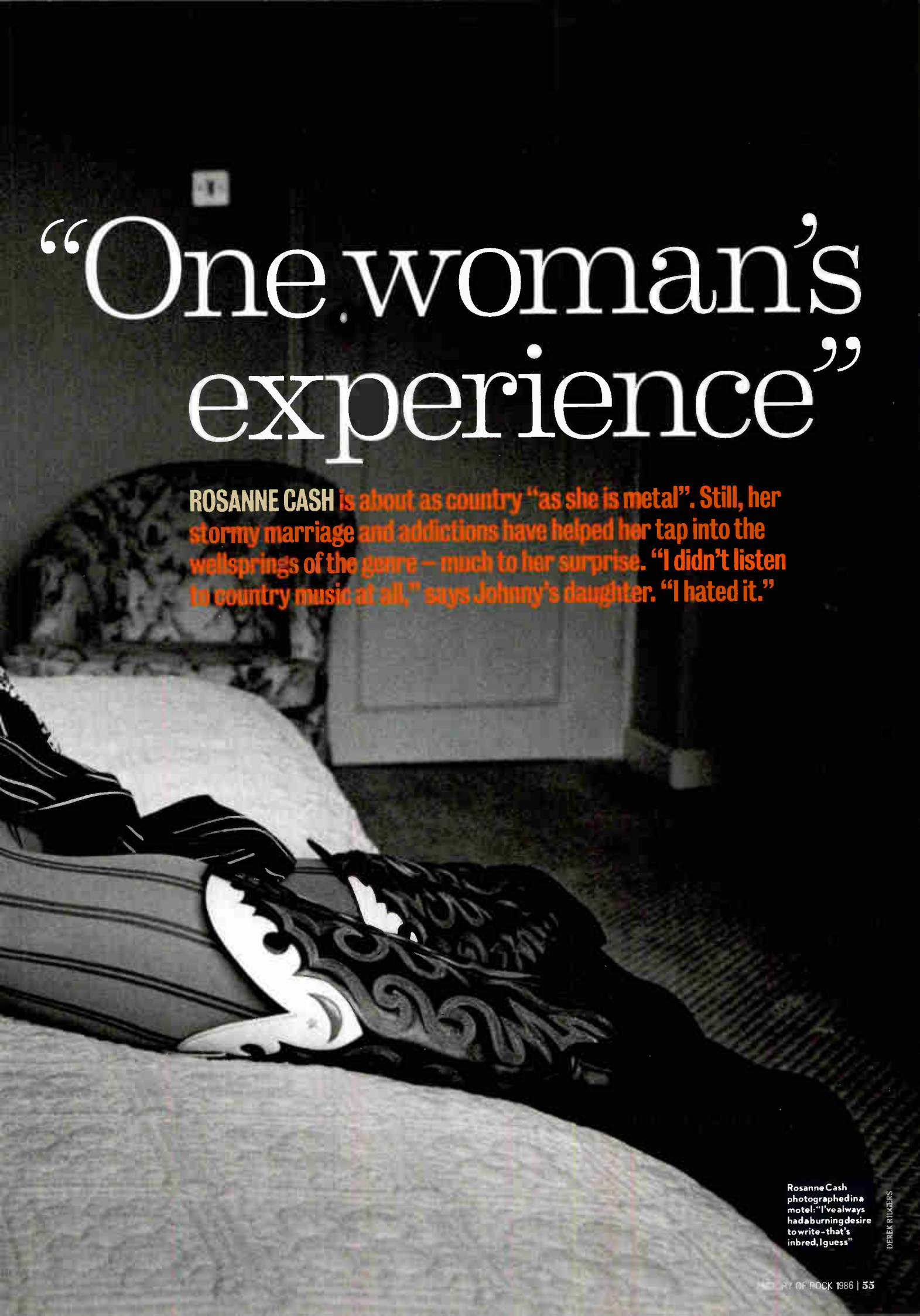
And, with that, they're off, Letts cadging a lift with Jones because cabs won't stop for dread, even in natty designer suits.

Oh yes, there's still a long, long way to go. *Steve Sutherland* •

> "It's all gone back to what it was before punk came in"

"One woman's experience"

ROSANNE CASH is about as country "as she is metal". Still, her stormy marriage and addictions have helped her tap into the wellsprings of the genre – much to her surprise. "I didn't listen to country music at all," says Johnny's daughter. "I hated it."



Rosanne Cash photographed in a motel: "I've always had a burning desire to write – that's inbred, I guess"

DEREK RIDGERS

— NME APRIL 26 —

BLUES FROM THE PINK BEDROOM

ROSANNE CASH RUFFLES her punky designer coiffure and shrugs. "I'm probably as far from that pure country sound as I am from metal, but they've just found a way of marketing it. I do mind the definition, it doesn't make sense. It's just an easy handle for the media."

Inevitable, I guess, that the daughter of Johnny Cash should be given the rhinestone saddle, but really there's little on her latest LP *Rhythm And Romance* that warrants the label. Her sound is cross-country, owing more to the crisp bright side of LA pop than it does to her hometown of Nashville. But the pundits persist. Together, she and husband Rodney Crowell have been labelled "country music's reigning royalty". Rosanne shudders.

"We make a real conscious effort to stay out of that bullshit. I don't buy that myth. There's a whole package deal that you're expected to buy if you're in country music. There's a certain way to relate to your fans, a certain way to make records, a way to look, to act and move through the machinery to become successful. I just don't buy it and neither does Rodney. In fact, it makes me feel uneasy.

"Those people are very sweet and genuine, but I really don't see life as that black and white, certainly not that simple. I just think there's an individual way to approach success, to approach life..."

Despite the awards and chart-topping records, Rosanne's ambivalence to fame has held her back from consolidating her success.

"I've got really contradictory feelings about the whole thing. I want to be successful, but at the same time I don't want to give my life away."

Yet your songs could hardly be more personal.

"It's really a dilemma, because I use writing in a self-indulgent way – for my own therapy and working things out. And at the same time you become very vulnerable. This all sounds very self-pitying, doesn't it? This is what I do, it's my work."

"The summer was the killer/ Between our hearts and minds/ Every day a drama/ Dragging by in quarter time" – "Halfway House"

Released and largely overlooked last year, *Rhythm And Romance* is Rosanne's fourth, most calmly authoritative and consistent LP. Drawing from a tempestuous year in her marriage and a personal battle against drug abuse, the songs are both paradigms in the craft of songwriting and sharp exercises in self-criticism and revelation. It's central to Rosanne's way with the word and melody that she absorbs the listener in her struggle, where most would alienate with introspective analysis and neurosis.

"It's just one woman's experience, her progress through a relationship. I approached it from a songwriter's point of view. From the beginning I said this was going to be a songwriter's album. I guess that would mean, since it's largely autobiographical, that it's a concept record."

"You give me no reason to cry, but I do/ You tell me you don't tell me lies, is that true?" – "Never Gonna Hurt"

The record hints at broader themes too; the inclusion of John Hiatt's "Pink Bedroom" gives it a savage tinge – taking a scalpel to the miserably empty lives and adolescent daydreams of poor little rich girls. The songs may be accessibly sweetened but the stance is unflinching – Rosanne's cool blue voice cuts through the gloss, singing of doubt, weakness, desperation and deceit. But the problem isn't just wanting and needing love, it's the inability to feel love. How apt that one of Middle America's finest songwriters should address herself to emotional numbness.

"I started doing drugs when I was 14 – in Southern California everybody does them. But after a while it stopped being recreational and became part of my personality. It stunts your emotional growth.

"Numbness is a real good word for it. I haven't taken drugs in two years and I still feel that parts of me and my awareness are just opening up.

"It's growing older, too. About three years ago I realised you have to take responsibility for your life in a lot of ways. You couldn't just coast, the only way to take power was to take responsibility and part of that meant giving up drugs."

Did turning 30 seem like you'd reached a landmark?

"Yeah, for the first time I felt self-contained, like I had a handle on my own power. Whereas in your twenties it's all flailing about with insecurity and anxiety. You're unsure of who you are or where you're going. Now I've become much more centred."

TRAUMA, DISSATISFACTION AND restlessness were recurring factors in the development of this wayward talent, born in Memphis in 1955, the first child of Johnny Cash and his first wife Vivian Liberto. She recalls her parents' marriage as being fiery, with bickering and arguments when her pill-popping father returned from his frequent tours. They split up when she was 11, by which time Rosanne and her mother had relocated in California.

"The first music I heard was Ray Charles, Marty Robbins and my dad's. But, as I grew up and began to make my own choices, I didn't listen to country music at all, I hated it. It wasn't a rebellious thing, I just didn't like country music."

Sheltered by her mother's strict Catholicism, she went, supervised, to concerts by Donovan and Peter, Paul & Mary but listened to The Doors, the Stones, The Beatles and, later, Elvin Bishop and Tom Petty. But she still had no musical ambitions, hating the notoriety she attracted because of her famous father.

On graduating from high school, she jumped at the chance to travel with The Johnny Cash Show initially as a laundress, eventually as a singer.

"When we were on the bus, he'd start singing old country songs. And I thought, 'God, some of those are pretty neat.' Then he made a list of 100 essential songs for me and my stepsister to learn – old folk songs, standard country, Carter Family songs. So I started to get a little interested."

After two years and a heartbreaking love affair, she left ("I didn't want to spend the rest of my time with my parents") for Los Angeles.

There she spent a while studying method acting and met her future husband Rodney Crowell at a party in Waylon Jennings' house. Crowell was a new breed of country writer, drawing on the imagery and tradition of the past but bringing an adventurousness to his lyrics and arrangements (his "I Ain't Living Long Like This" is a standout on Jennings' minor classic *Honky Tonk Heroes* album).

Following an ill-formed debut album, Rosanne's second LP, *Right Or Wrong*, yielded three hit singles, but she began to have anxiety attacks about bringing up her first child in the Los Angeles fast lane. She moved to Nashville and released *Seven Year Ache* (which includes "Blue Moon After Heartache", a gorgeous tear-stained opus, still my favourite Rosanne song, and "Somewhere In The Stars").

Despite continued acclaim, Rosanne wasn't happy with either her personal life or professional output and a lay-off ensued before *Rhythm And Romance*. Usually fraught and nervous in the studio, this time she went in without the crutch of her husband as producer.

How did he react to the album's frankness?

March 15, 1986: performing on *Saturday Night Live*

"Well it's not easy, is it, having your personal life opened up? He can appreciate the songs from an objective viewpoint as a songwriter. But between me and him it's a different thing."

She's still not totally satisfied with the record, pertinently noting that the clear, luminous hues of the music sometimes act to smother the calculating innocence, lethal charm and meanness beneath the surface.

"I feel the songs stand for themselves, but the sound doesn't let you get close enough to them. You know what's odd is that I didn't go in with an idea about the sound as much as the songs. That was my main involvement. But now I've got a real strong idea what I want the sound on the next record to be like.

"But you're never satisfied or else you become complacent and start doing parodies of yourself. I appreciate dissatisfaction.

"I've always had a burning desire to write – that's inbred, I guess. Everybody wants to become better, don't they? In that sense I'm very ambitious, in terms of pleasing myself rather than looking for outward success. Sure I like attention, but at times it makes me very anxious."

If you hadn't had a stormy marriage, would you still get inspired?

"I don't believe in that thing that you have to be miserable to be creative. I think there's a wellspring of stuff that you can continue drawing on and you don't always have to be miserable to do it. Besides, I think that creative thread carries its own angst with it. It's self-perpetuating."

With most of the follow-up to *Rhythm And Romance* already written, and Crowell's first album in five years, telling his side of the story, due for release, it seems that two of America's best New Age artists are back on solid ground. While Rosanne regards herself first and foremost as a writer, she feels the personal nature of her songs begs her own interpretation, although eventually she'd like to write for others.

> "I use writing in a self-indulgent way – for my own therapy"

Having recently taken up meditation, and eschewing the dogma of her Catholic upbringing, Cash's religious outlook is opposite to her parents' and the country tradition. Likewise her political outlook.

"Anti-Reagan. I don't trust anyone who takes money away from education and food for pregnant women and puts it into weapons.

"As a writer I still feel like a neophyte, so it's all autobiographical, but I hope to God it gets to the point where I can write outside of myself. That's part of your growth as a writer, I guess."

For pleasure Rosanne listens to Los Lobos, Bob Dylan, Tom Petty and Kate Bush. Her favourite writers are Rodney Crowell (surprise, surprise), John Hiatt, Elvis (humph) Costello and Chrissie Hynde.

Her sound and taste reflect a new era of cosmopolitan country. It bears scant relation to the rootsy homeliness of The Judds, George Strait and Ricky Skaggs; but if it is to retain relevance in an age of increasing technology and dwindling agrarian isolation, the Nashville hierarchy that rejected *Rhythm And Romance* would be wise to accept her.

One factor that does link Rosanne to the past is the subject matter of her songs – she deals with pain and heartache graphically and imaginatively.

Why is sadness a staple part of country songs, old and new?

"Because the human condition isn't that different for everybody, and it's something everyone relates to."

Isn't it a bit odd that we should get enjoyment from reflected misery?

"It's not so much enjoyment as healing; throwing a light on it and showing what it is starts a healing process. For the writer and whoever hears it. That's part of what music's about, isn't it?" *Gavin Martin* •

R.M. LEWIS JR. / NBC / GETTY

"We don't believe in leprechauns, so why should we believe in the Queen?": Morrissey airs his feelings on the monarchy in 1986

"It's been a great strain"

On behalf of THE SMITHS, their singer MORRISSEY discusses their new work – and the band's unique place in the "vile" music business alongside Madonna, Prince and Bob Geldof. "Complaining is so unmanly," he says, "which is why I do it so well!"

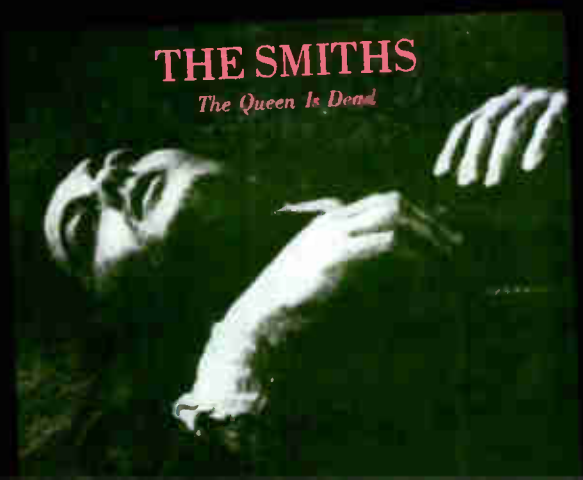
— NME JUNE 7 —

MORRISSEY'S ELEGANT RETREAT in one of Chelsea's most sought-after lilac-scented squares is every bit the English gentleman's home. Admittedly the huge matt-black ghetto blaster and the naked star-is-born lightbulbs round the bathroom mirror rupture the atmosphere somewhat, but the feel is decidedly classic. Sherlock Holmes might have taken up residence here, indulged himself with a little opium and a silk smoking jacket, solved a few cases.

"I could never really exist in any place unless it pleased me in every single aspect – which this almost practically does," he tells me while pouring tea into some fine china cups. "If I couldn't have really beautiful furniture I'd sleep in a shoe box." And, anticipating the response, he adds, "I was always like that really."

This rented mansion flat is his second home. He also owns a house in Manchester looked after for him by his mother, but his considerable book collection, spread either side of the marble fireplace, implies that at least half of his soul has come down to London. I cannot find anything on these shelves that surprises me. Wilde, Dean, Beaton, Kael, Delaney... an unashamed shrine to his most revered icons.

Obsessed as he is by English culture, I ask him whether he's read any of the country's more contemporary writers. Ian McEwan, Graham Swift, Martin Amis even? He looks »



ALAMY

at me as if I'm clinically insane. "Not even on a wet day. One reads the name Leslie Thomas and thinks nobody with a name like that could possibly write an interesting book."

When I point out that he's been responsible for popularising a group with the blandest name in the history of pop, he says, feigning weariness, "Yes I know... it's been a great strain. You see before you a mere cast of a man," and bursts out laughing.

On the contrary he looks the picture of health compared to the days when only his quiff seemed well fed, so perhaps there's something to be said for clinging to one's familiar obsessions. It seems extraordinary that he's still reading the latest books on the Moors Murderers and James Dean. It's all meticulously deliberate. "I'm restrictive," he notes with the hint of a smirk. "I can lapse into Jane Austen, never quite Dickens, but nothing outrageously modern really."

A request to peruse the record collection is declined. "I keep mine in Manchester. That's the sort of thing I do in private. They're little bathroom activities, playing records. I mean, I could despise a person if I came across a particular record in their possession, however kind that person had been to me in the past. One rancid LP and I'd be lashing out at their shins!"

I make a mental note to bury that first Madonna LP should he ever return the visit.

Further conversation only confirms that Morrissey is diligently chiselling away at the same granite image that was first unveiled when The Smiths released their debut single, "Hand In Glove", in May of 1983. Except the statue's almost finished now. It's more a question of polishing, of honing a creation that's almost Luddite in its refusal to accept the present, let alone the future.

With his gods in a glass case, the litany also embraces George Formby, British films of the '60s, especially *A Taste Of Honey*, stock tragedies like Monroe, a mind virtually closed to most contemporary music... "Not another hip hop record or whatever they're called"... artwork for the new Smiths LP, *The Queen Is Dead*, that borders on parody, and an archetypal film still of a serene Alain Delon, it's easy to wonder how The Smiths could ever do anything fresh.

The singles have kept coming, though, and with the possible exception of "Shakespeare's Sister", all have been worth treasuring. But close observers have seen the stumbles. A long and acrimonious kitchen-sink-to-court-room row with their label Rough Trade (once an alliance between indie and great white hope that was depicted as some kind of political statement) delaying the release of the new LP by eight months – very rock biz, that – whingeing in the camp about low chart placings and, worse still, the debilitating curse of pop groups throughout the known universe that is euphemistically known as "personal problems".

That said, for their supremely dedicated followers, The Smiths remain the only group worth bothering with, and for once these fans aren't far wrong. On first hearing, *The Queen Is Dead* might be assumed another exercise in consummate Smithdom. After all, nothing much has changed on the surface. The same

> "I felt there was one last vein untapped and we tapped it"

JO NOVARK

Classic Smiths: (l-r) Andy Rourke, Johnny Marr, Morrissey and Mike Joyce

lineup, guitars and drums, no horns or keyboards, no fanciful departures. Yet further listening reveals a record touched by a musical and lyrical vision that dwarfs most around them.

Its pleasures are all the more heightened for their rarity. The Smiths' breakthrough in '83 was sudden and exhilarating. Three LPs and countless singles later and nobody's followed them. The indie scene isn't so much a ghetto any more, it's a shantytown from which there's no escape. And the majors preserve their tidy and mostly vacuous domain with a fervent sense of what is right and wrong for mass consumption.

While championing Easterhouse and at one stage The Woodentops (whom he now insists on calling The Sudden Flops, a comment that reflects not just the dashed expectations but their campaign against him which culminated with a bomb "threat" – such serious young boys!). Morrissey has now adopted a posture of extreme pessimism, placing his group as the full stop at the end of Rock Babylon.

"But what else can happen," he says matter-of-factly. "Is there anything else to happen? No there isn't, because the industry is dying, and the music is dying. It's like if you look at the film industry, there's really nothing else that can happen. All the stories of human life have been told. I felt there was one last vein untapped and we tapped it. Now that source has been used there's really only cultural desert in front of us, nothing but cultural desert.

"Even if you detest The Smiths, you have to admit they have their own corner, but it's not really possible to build one's own corner any more. That The Smiths have their own corner is in itself quite remarkable.

"I mean, I was ill and I said I was ill. Nobody had ever said that they were ill before. Within this beautiful sexy syndrome I popularised NHS spectacles! I didn't popularise the hearing aid – thank God that didn't catch on – but that again was one of my statements. Not a prop, because that sounds like marshmallow shoes or a polka-dot suit. I mean, I really maintain to this day that even the whole flowers element was remarkably creative, never wacky or stupid.

"We can say, 'Yes, Morrissey that silly old eccentric', but I think it's nice if somebody who is eccentric can break through. Everybody follows the same rules and does exactly what they're told. All modern groups state the expected – fluently, but who cares."

LET'S TALK ABOUT the new LP.

"Why, for heaven's sake?"

The Smiths' new LP begins with the title track and a few verses of Cicely Courtneidge's shambling but defiant version of "Take Me Back To Dear Old Blighty" from *The L-Shaped Room*. The song, as it did in the film, speaks for a certain Englishness; indeed for Morrissey, a priceless Englishness that has vanished forever.

In the original scene, Courtneidge plays a forgotten wartime performer living out her last days in a shabby flat in Fulham. She revives the half-remembered singalong one Christmas, surrounded by the new cosmopolitan Londoners. It's a scene heavy with pathos and one that conjures up an England perhaps more gentle and certainly more simple in its charms. A place that eulogised witty conversation, well-turned letters, cornershops and theatrical hams.

The Queen Is Dead isn't just a straight lament, however. It uses the Queen as a double-edged metaphor for a world we have lost and the meaningless heritage of the monarchy in 1986.

> "All modern groups state the expected – fluently, but who cares?"

But if the royal family do achieve something, it's to bring American tourists to this country, which as you might expect, is hardly a source of joy for dear Morrissey. It goes deeper than that though. His disgust for our new England is fuelled by its steady Americanisation. The missiles, the burger bars, the one-dimensional me-generation lust for gold-plated, designer-stamped success.

Unwillingly dragged screaming into the 20th century, Morrissey seems in so many ways closer to his previous generation than his successors. In fact, he doesn't mind saying so. For him the future is an encroaching nightmare.

"These people may have no sense of the social," he says of the '80s survivalists, "but more importantly, they also have no sense of taste. They have such bad taste in every area, and that's the main thing that worries me."

Which all begins to make Morrissey sound like a sentimental old nostalgic. This he would deny to the death, and while it's easy to sympathise with his loathing for yuppie culture and the loss of English gentility, he does spend an enormous amount of time looking over his shoulder.

I always thought he was a bit long in the tooth to be singing about schooldays on "The Headmaster Ritual", and the song "Meat Is Murder" has a worryingly sixth-form quality to it as well. Now, on *The Queen Is Dead*, and having just turned 27, he presents us with songs about leaving home!

"Yes, yes, but..." he says in his most engaging purr, which roughly translated means 'Have an opinion, but for Oscar's sake pull yourself together and see some sense'. "Don't you find that even now certain memories of school still cling and then suddenly you remember the day in 1963 when somebody did something wholly insignificant to you?"

To be honest, I don't; there's always more recent memories ready to haunt you. Didn't he realise that most people of his age had »

It's also one of the most exciting rock songs The Smiths have ever made, Johnny Marr's music pulling the listener into a giddying black farce.

"I didn't want to attack the monarchy in a sort of beer-monster way," he explains in that ever-more-seductive Manchester brogue. "But I find, as time goes by, this happiness we had slowly slips away and is replaced by something that is wholly grey and wholly saddening. The very idea of the monarchy and the Queen Of England is being reinforced and made to seem more useful than it really is."

I suggest that the hardest thing to stomach about the monarchy these days is the way they're increasingly used as political camouflage. Five million unemployed? Have another royal wedding, chaps.

"Oh yes, it's disgusting. When you consider what minimal contribution they make in helping people. They never under any circumstances make a useful statement about the world or people's lives. The whole thing seems like a joke, a hideous joke. We don't believe in leprechauns, so why should we believe in the Queen?

"And when one looks at all the individuals within the royal family they're so magnificently, unaccountably and unpardonably boring! I mean, Diana herself has never in her lifetime uttered one statement that has been of any use to any member of the human race. If we have to put up with these ugly individuals, why can't they at least do something off the mark?"

July 5, 1986: with Craig Gannon (second left) on rhythm guitar – and a schoolboy wearing a hearing aid and a back-pocket posy helping out on vocals – The Smiths perform "Panic" (inset) on Channel 4's *Euro Tube* show

been through their lads-smoking-behind-the-bike-shed stage, the romance and marriage stage, and were now on to the divorce and mark-two lover stage?

"And I'm still waiting to be chosen for the swimming team!

"But I do feel in an absolute way that I've been sleepwalking for 26 years. On the bleak moments when I came to consciousness I was reading the *New Statesman*. You see, I never did all those trivial pursuits. I did read all those music magazines.

"I mean, I can remember when *NME* was 12 pence! I can remember when *Disc* was six pence. I can remember when you could buy all four weekly magazines for under 50 pence!"

ONE THING MORRISSEY has learnt to do is to feel burdened by the pressures of success. The vehicle for his complaint is "Frankly Mr Shankly", a brilliant piece of modern music hall that carefully offsets the poverty of the privileged with an ironical jauntiness. It's one of the LP's landmarks and defines new ground for The Smiths, but those lyrics? It forces the question: aren't you just moaning about fame like they always do?

"Yes! Like they always do!" he replies with an extravagant sweep of his arm. "Yes I'm moaning about fame," he repeats, caressing his brow with the most melodramatic hands in the history of the stage. "I was reaching for the rubber but I thought, 'Well no, I do want to complain, I do want to moan.' Complaining is so unmanly, which is why I do it so well!"

As the laughter trails away, he continues. "Yes... *fame, fame, fatal fame can play hideous tricks on the brain*. It really is so odd, and I think I've said this before – God I suddenly sounded like Roy Hattersley – when one reaches so painfully for something and suddenly it's flooding over one's body, there is pain in the pleasure. Don't get me wrong, I still want it, and I still need it, but...

"Even though you can receive 500 letters from people who will say that the record made me feel completely alive – suddenly doing something remarkably simple like making a candle can seem more intriguing in a perverted sense than writing another song. But what is anything without pain?"

In the past, much has been made of Morrissey's stock heroes, the spectres of Wilde and Dean not just hovering in the background but actually there, embodied in his flamboyant and frequently self-deprecating humour and the exquisitely tousled quiff set off against the eternal faded blue jeans. His absorption of those characters has played tricks with both time and image, yet much of it, particularly the rugged Dean connotations, is a smokescreen.

The lyrics of the new LP, littered as they are with notions of home and leaving home, put you in no doubt as to who Morrissey's real hero or heroine is... his mother. But this isn't easy to talk about. Not that he doesn't agree with my suggestion – it's just that for once this is one subject he would prefer to avoid in print.

"Mentally, I don't believe I've ever left home," he concedes. "You always think that as life progresses you're going to open different doors. But the shock to me is that you actually don't... But who will accept describing one's life as a really bad dream, Ian? Millions of people will just because it's never stated, it's not implausible and it's not dramatic."

For every song exploring the special pain of loneliness on *The Queen Is Dead* – "*If you're so clever, why are you on your own tonight?*" he croons magnificently on the chilling "I Know It's Over" – there's a comic equivalent to balance things out. It's refreshing to know that even the prince of misery likes to have a good laugh now and again.

REX FEATURES

Quite purposefully a record of extremes, it jumps with wild abandon from the tragic to the humorous. The title song manages to combine both at the same time. Having invaded the Palace, he confronts the Queen with a rhyme more outrageous than the original crime – *"And so I broke into the Palace with a sponge and rusty spanner/ She said, 'Eh, I know you and you cannot sing'/ I said, 'That's nothing – you should hear me play pianer.'"*

He also dares to suggest that Charles might brighten all our lives with a dash of transvestism and that the clergy have been doing it for years anyway, which proves that cheek isn't just the province of journalists and market traders.

Taking on the guise of the agony aunt – he worships every dribble from the lips of Claire Rayner and wilts with envy every time she reveals another chintzy outfit – he says, "Sometimes I think, 'Well, Morrissey, you've got them sitting by the bed with their pills, you'd better do something quick!'"

Those who like to picture him as the last of the great bedroom angst merchants might be enlightened to discover that the apogee of English nudge'n'wink humour, the *Carry On* saga, gets his selective approval.

"There were 27 films made in all," he notes authoritatively, "and at least six of them are high art. They finished artistically in '68 but it went on, I think, to '76 or '78. When you think of Charles Hawtrey, Kenneth Williams, Hattie Jacques, Barbara Windsor, Joan Sims, Sid James... the wealth of talent!

"They've tried to recreate those things again in *The Comic Strip* or whatever and those awful, offensive *Nine O'Clock News* things. They tried to recreate that clannishness of comedians and it doesn't work. It's not just a matter of talent, or getting people together. It's something else."

And if you're still in doubt over Morrissey's comic sensibility, let me just tell you that currently his favourite TV show is *Cagney And Lacey*. "You don't watch it? My, you're crumbling before me!"

He's always complained that people have failed to notice the humour, so perhaps that explains the generous helping. Much of it may be disturbingly black, the gallows jests of a condemned man, but most importantly, it works. "Cemetry Gates" delves into more mirth and morbidity.

"It's like famous last words. So many people's last words were so riotously memorable. Howard Devoto was telling me about – we were in a cemetery because we'd decided to do a tour of London cemeteries, cheerful little buggers that we are; you know, get the Guinness and cheese butties out and head down to Brompton Cemetery – some old corporal dying, smothered in blood, having a very artistic coronary arrest and his right-hand man was saying, 'Don't be silly, Charles, cheer up, cheer up, we're going to Bognor this weekend.' And he turned round to his friend and said, 'Bugger Bognor!', and 'Bugger Bognor!' actually appeared on his tombstone as his famous last words. I think that should be an LP title... *Bugger Bognor!*."

"Cemetry Gates" doesn't just make jokes about grave humour, though. It's concerned with the prickly matter of plagiarisation. He says he's always been happy to admit he's borrowed a few lines or two, most of them from movies. *A Taste Of Honey*, *Rebel Without A Cause* and *Sleuth* have all aided the Morrissey muse.

What he objects to are those smug anal retentives who think they've found you out and denounce your entire canon of work as tainted by theft. "Obviously most people who write do borrow from other sources," he contends. "They steal from other's clotheslines. I mentioned the line *'I dreamt about you last night and I fell out of bed twice'* in "Reel Around The Fountain", which comes directly from *A Taste Of Honey*, and to this day I'm whipped persistently for the use of that line.

"I've never made any secret of the fact that at least 50 per cent of my reason for writing can be blamed on Shelagh Delaney, who wrote *A Taste Of Honey*. And 'This Night Has Opened My Eyes' is a *Taste Of Honey* song – putting the entire play to words. But I have never in my life made any secrets of my reference points.

"Just because there's one line that's a direct lift, people will now say to me that 'Reel Around The Fountain' is worthless, ignoring the rest of it, which almost certainly comes from my brain. Oscar Wilde... I've found so many instances where he has directly lifted from others. To me that's fine. But because I'm so serious about writing, people are so serious about tripping me up."

I'M SURE THAT many will find the undercurrent of death and depression on *The Queen Is Dead* difficult to cope with. This time round, Morrissey's special brand of terminal humour may lighten the load, but much of the material is gloriously doomy. What's more, it seems hard to square with the relatively cheerful young man I see before me.

And when I tell him that he certainly looks better and laughs more than he used to, he shakes his head as if I was trying to attack the whole foundations of his career. I need glasses, he splutters, I need to look again.

"I'm not happy, I'm not," he cries. "I know a lot of people at this stage will throw down the magazine and say, 'Well, Morrissey, this is your platform, this is your proud badge that you wear, that you gladly cycle on the edge of a cliff and you're ready to throw your handlebars to the wind.'

"But almost every aspect of human life really quite seriously depresses me... I do feel that all those tags, the depressive, the monotony, all tags I've dodged or denied are probably absolutely accurate. When you put me next to Five Star and judge the whole thing against the bouncingly moronic attitude that is so useful if one wants a job in the music industry, then yes, I am a depressive. If I wasn't doing this I don't honestly believe that I would want to live. And one hesitates about making such statements because, however one makes them, it never seems useful."

That somebody of his nature exists within the British pop industry at all is intriguing to say the least, but methinks he does exaggerate the case. The Smiths' sheer output, for a start: they can release singles with a rapidity that seems to spray the charts like a machine gun compared with their weary rivals; and their music – only a handful can make pop as beautiful as theirs; all argue against the leaden weight of a true depressive.

> "Almost every aspect of human life quite seriously depresses me"

What Morrissey does appear to suffer from is a state of permanent adolescence. Just as he refuses to leave the 19th century, he refuses to leave home. "I know," he remarks with a kind of blissful resignation. "It's a national disgrace! We know there's a shame attached to it. If you're still living with your parents at 19 you're considered »

SOME MOTHERS DO 'AVE 'EM

A Gentleman At Leisure: the *NME* enters the Chelsea mews of one MORRISSEY, and what an accommodating fellow he is. How *is* life? One enquires, and receives in return impudence,

THE DOOR was ajar. Why not, I thought, and walked in. The flat appeared to be arranged on more than one floor and finding nobody on the first I climbed the stairs to the

"The Queen Is Dead" isn't just a straight lament however. It uses the Queen as a double edged metaphor for a world we have lost and the meaningless heritage of the monarchy in 1986. It's also one of the most exciting rock songs The Smiths have ever made. Johnny Marr's music pulling the listener into a giddying black farce.

"I didn't want to attack the monarchy in a sort of beer monster way," he explains in

some club-footed bespectacled monster of repressed sexuality – which is in every case absolutely true!"

The hysterical fit of giggling that follows is a sight for sore eyes.

He's not been slow before to criticise Joy Division for their supposed suicide chic, and who would deny that group gained another vital dimension in the aftermath of Ian Curtis' death. Any image has its price, and The Smiths excuse theirs through artistic integrity. But the fact remains that some of these songs aren't far short of aesthetic Exit manuals.

Discovering that six people "who were alarmingly dedicated to The Smiths" have taken their lives over the last two years suggests that this isn't simply melodrama. "Their friends and parents wrote to me after they'd died," he explains. "It's something that shouldn't really be as hard to speak about as it is, because if people are basically unhappy and people basically want to die, then they will.

"Although it's very hard for many people to accept, I do actually respect suicide, because it is having control over one's life. It's the strongest statement anyone can make, and people aren't really strong. You could say it was negative leaving the world, but if people's lives are so enriched in the first place then ideas of suicide would never occur. Most people, as we know, lead desperate and hollow lives.

"I can't feel responsible... totally. I know that in most instances that for the last sad period of these people's lives at least having The Smiths was useful to them."

Had he ever considered suicide himself?

"About 183 times, yes. I think you reach the point where you can no longer think of your parents and the people you'll leave behind. You go beyond that stage and you can only think of yourself.

"It's a situation people can so easily toy with and find very romantic. All the great pop stars which nobody ever cared about when they existed – their deaths throw a magnificently alluring colouration on to their total existence as human beings. Whereas if most of these people had lived, nobody would have cared a lot.

"I think suicide intrigues everybody. And yet it's one of those things that nobody can ever really talk about in an interesting way. You always have the usual 'Oh, it's so negative, it's so wrong' attitude."

Isn't your fascination with death, I argue, a convenient way of giving your life meaning when you should be looking elsewhere?

"No, I don't think so. So many of the people that I admire took their lives... Stevie Smith, Sylvia Plath, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Rachel Roberts... there are many..."

ONE NEW SONG, the delicious "Some Girls Are Bigger Than Others", must be the most evocative verse about nothing ever written. For some reason all kinds of permutations go through your mind when it's playing, a hilarious send-up of Page Three among others, and one can't help be reminded that Morrissey doesn't write songs about women – unless they happen to be his mother.

"Well, there are songs about women," he claims before collapsing into laughter again. "You just have to dig for them. You have to dig very deep for them. I do want to write about women. The whole idea of womanhood is something that to me is largely unexplored. I'm realising things about women that I never realised before, and 'Some Girls...' is just taking it down to the basic absurdity of recognising the contours to one's body. The fact that I've scuttled through 26 years of life without ever noticing that the contours of the body are different is an outrageous farce!"

> "Madonna reinforces everthing absurd and offensive"

Yet there are signs that he may one day grow up, though I'm certainly not implying that this is something to be encouraged. The longest period of celibacy outside of a Buddhist monastery has been broken. "I lapsed slightly," he admits. "I was caught off guard, as it were. But I return of course as triumphant as ever to the most implausible, unbelievable, necessary absurd situation that could befall any intelligent person."

Ever fallen in love?

"Yes, no, yes, no, yes, no... and that's about as clear as I can be!"

In an arena inhabited by the most ridiculous macho monsters, The Smiths present an image that is absolutely non-phallic. What sexuality the group do possess is of a far more natural kind than that presented by the crotch-fixated bimbos of MTV world. Not everybody can accept this. When *Smash Hits* set Morrissey up with friend Peter Burns for a predictable queen bitch stand-off, they apparently wrote what they wanted.

"It was a completely civil and honest interview with Pete and I," he recalls, "and they turned us into Hinge And Bracket. I was supposed to have called him Joan Collins and... it was completely laced with camp symbolism – which never occurred. I was really upset... they made us look like a couple of dippy queens."

I wonder what he thought of the sexual models on offer at the moment. Madonna, Prince, Boy George?

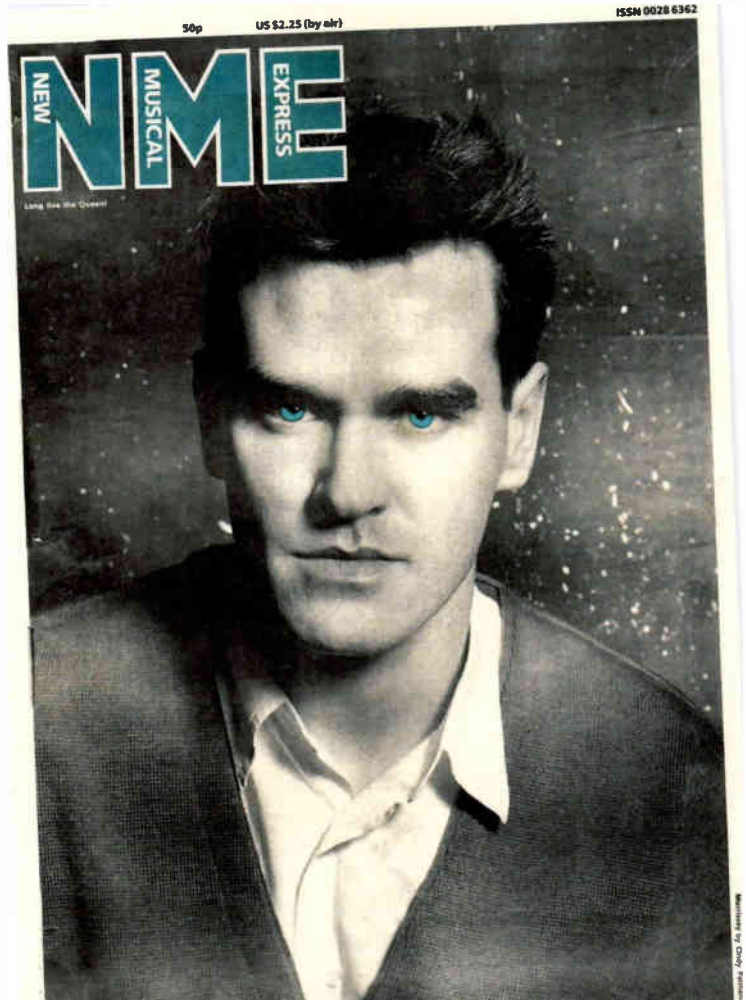
"Obviously Madonna reinforces everything absurd and offensive. Desperate womanhood. Madonna is closer to organised prostitution than anything else. I mean the music industry is obviously prostitution anyway, but there are degrees.

"For me Prince conveys nothing. The fact that he's successful in America is interesting simply because he's mildly fey and that hasn't happened before there. Boy George, again I think he really doesn't say anything either."

In their unique position as successful outsiders The Smiths have escaped the kind of coverage most pop stars have to enjoy or endure in the national press. There have been other attempts to dig the dirt.

The latest is a book by Mick Middles which mixes anecdote with the kind of trainspotter mentality only the most fervent fan could lap up. For Morrissey it proved a fascinating read.

"I don't really expect his book to be found anywhere other than the fiction section! It was so riddled with inaccuracies that to me it was a thrilling commodity. I learnt so much. If I have any doubt about the future I need only glance at this book to know what to do, so in that sense Mick Muddled has



been of religious assistance in more ways than one. I had no idea, for instance, that at one point I was going to manage Theatre Of Hate. I don't even know who Theatre Of Hate are. So to me it was an illuminating collection of gossip."

October 24, 1986: The Smiths at Brixton Academy in South London

THAT THE SMITHS wish to do more than serenade the world in its twilight hours is borne out by a constant theme that might be summed up as a plea for care and compassion. With this in mind, and allowing for the fact that they embody the sensibilities of a vast section of young people across the world, it seems amazing they weren't asked to take part in Band Aid. Or does it?

According to Morrissey, "nobody younger than Bob Geldof was allowed near that stage, because otherwise The Boomtown Rats would have seemed like a collection of Brontasaurasi. And nobody who had not sold a million was allowed near the stage. Have The Boomtown Rats sold a million? Remarkable group if they have!"

Not even the broadening out of the appeal to include the likes of Fashion Aid and Sports Aid has done anything to change his original attitude of scorn. We've been blinded by the money raised, he argues, fooled by a showbiz sham.

"If it had dealt with a domestic issue I don't believe it would have received any attention whatsoever. I'm sure the organisers would have been kicked to death. If we talk about unemployment in England, we're slapped across the face. I think there was something almost glamorous about the whole Ethiopian epic. In the first instance it was far away, overseas. Pop stars, film stars, it was and still is escapism.

"The glamour veils a more serious question – knowing the world is controlled, why are such things allowed to happen. But I'm also appalled that the guilt of such an occurrence should be placed upon the shoulders of the British public. It's absurd. How many people in England live below the poverty line?

"I got a foul scent when it first occurred, and I still get the same smell. It's an inch away from Hollywood. When will the film appear? The solo LP is on the horizon, the book is here. It's bully tactics and dining out with royalty. It's not shaking Margaret Thatcher by the lapels when he had the chance. No... and hearing Bob talk so lovingly about Prince Charles! To me it's so unreal. I never mentioned the word greed!"

The Smiths did, however, play the last date of the Red Wedge tour, but not without reservations.

"Without wishing to sound pugnaciously poncified, I wasn't terribly impassioned by the gesture," he says with a smile. "I thought the overall presentation was pretty middle-aged. And I can't really see anything especially useful in Neil Kinnock. I don't feel any alliance with him, but if one must vote, this is where I feel the black X should go. So that was why we made a very brief, but stormy, appearance.

"When we took to the stage, the audience reeled back in horror. They took their Walkmans off and threw down their cardigans. Suddenly the place was alight, aflame with passion!"

Together we talk about the future, the dreaded beast of Morrissey's worst dreams. We both agree Margaret Thatcher will probably kill us all. Rough Trade won't be insisting on any more videos and The Smiths won't be making them. Andy Rourke has rejoined the group. Craig Gannon is the new fifth member, but they aren't turning into the Rolling Stones, just playing with them; Johnny Marr is working on two offshoot projects, one with Keith Richards and the other with Bryan Ferry. There's a British and American tour to come and a new single, "Panic".

You could almost say everything looks rosy. His head tilted to one side, enjoying the comfort of a favourite armchair, Morrissey is relaxed. The world's favourite misery goat seems radiant for a man in torment. He's left school, left home (almost)... What next, a relationship, I suggest as a parting thought?

"I wanted to say this to you," he says slowly in a tone of confidentiality. "I always thought my genitals were the result of some crude practical joke. I remember an *NME* interview in the very early 1970s – it was Gary Glitter. It concluded with the remark 'the constant reminder that there's something between his legs'. And I thought it might be quite fitting to end this with... the constant reminder that there's absolutely nothing between his legs!"

I'm sure you're disappointing millions!

"Ian... I doubt it... which is very disappointing to me." *Ian Pye* •

PETER STILL/GETTY

"A realist and a fatalist"

After the Wham! split, GEORGE MICHAEL shows himself to be every inch the concerned pop star. Anti-apartheid, anti-Tory, and with a solo career underway that only a tabloid might knock off course. "A gay story," he thinks, "or a pregnant girl."

— NME JUNE 28 —

"ALTHOUGH I AM honest, I will deal with an interview with the confidence of *George Michael, Pop Star*. And the way I deal with people day to day is constantly fighting to put people at their ease. Half the people I meet probably go away thinking, 'What a crawler!' You have to constantly play down to be accepted as normal; you're on tip-toes in case people think you're walking all over them."

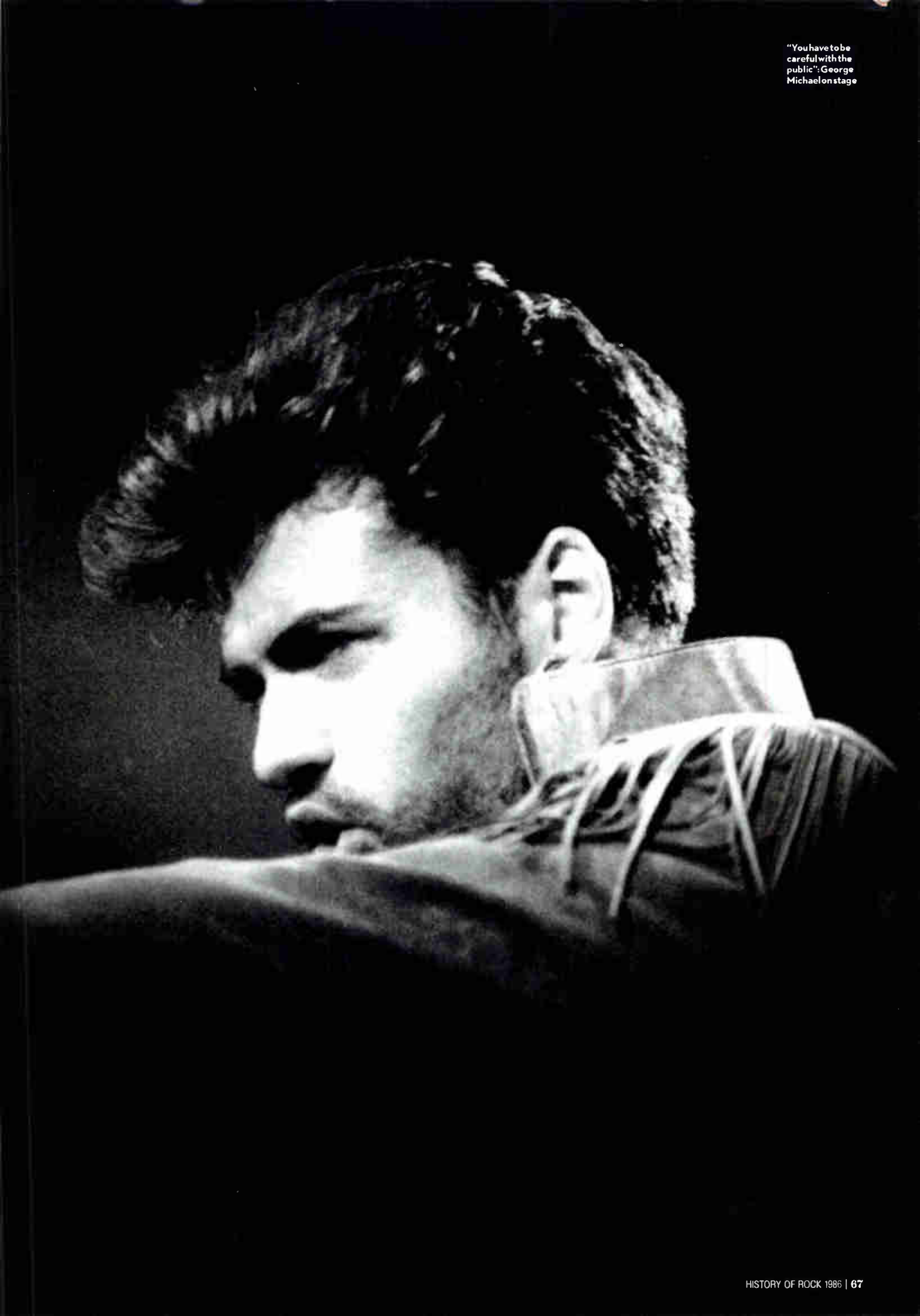
Rarely have I felt less walked over than by *George Michael, Pop Star*. Why should I feel walked over? All he has over me is a clean driving licence, a marginally more melodious singing voice and an annual income approximately 200 times my own. Mere trifles, really.

In addition to this, I have finally got over that crippling rockist disease which brings one out in a paroxysm of spluttering outrage at the mere thought that Wham! are Number One (well, Two actually) and Hüsker Dü aren't.

Not long ago I deliriously imagined the Whammyspandydurannie frankie Club bestrode the world like a colostomy bag, of which George'n'Andy were the biggest bowelquake; the brownest, the shiniest, the most stinking rich. They'd corrupted the kids! They'd dazzled them with trinkets and highlights and cheesy grins and so turned their heads from the serious business of burning down the House Of Commons! They were in league with Mrs Thatcher!

In short, Wham! and their lackey-stooge ilk were a sign of the times rather than ahead of them, as I fondly believed their pop precursors to be. Buy a Beatles record and change your life; buy a Wham! record and »

REX / SHUTTERSTOCK



"You have to be careful with the public": George Michael on stage

watch your interest grow. But times have changed and pop is not what it was. The mass pop community based on hopeless romanticism has gone, to be replaced by career-pop, pop as commodity with an attendant set of commodity values. Our mass media is pop-saturated; it's now a buyer's market. All the mystique of the hard-to-get, the forbidden, the rebellious, has been allayed by surfeit of choice. Pop's no big deal any more.

And so it is that *George Michael, Pop Careerist* sits chatting amiably beside me on a large grey sofa in a chic grey suite in a very expensive London hotel, bolthole of visiting foreign film stars and the like. When we shake hands in the lobby and ride up in the lift, his eyes hardly meet mine. But now we're all cosy, me with my beer, he with his can of Coke he makes last over two hours, and the only hint of unease is his thumb tightly enclosed in his fist – a classic sign of insecurity.

George Michael, Success Story talks about himself with the guiltless relaxation of a man who's made it big and can handle it. A Rolls was parked in the Michael driveway long before George sang a note, according to an inside source, so money's no shock to his system. And above all, he has the self-confidence of popular success which encourages him to think he knows just what people do – and don't – want.

"I know that I sound self-satisfied and I know that I've got an ego," he says, "but I don't have an ego problem."

As for George's favourite word, his most commonly recurring conversational tic – it's "basically". He's got an awful lot to say, which he wants to boil down to basics. Here goes…

"Basically, the whole American ideal of the possibility of becoming middle-class, the idea of aspiration, was something that was going to happen. The idea of the '80s being sex and suntans, and us being the epitome of it, is perfectly true. We're up there, supposedly promoting it, but it's there anyway.

"Kids have now decided that when they're 13 and 14 they don't want to be teenagers, they don't want the next seven years to be a time when they go out and experiment and totally disassociate themselves with childhood and adulthood, which is basically what I grew up with. I did the soulboy bit and went through a mod period as well: I didn't want to look like my parents or the way I'd looked a couple of years before.

"But kids now want designer clothes when they're 13, they want to look like the young mums and dads they see on the telly. That idea of looking middle-class even though your earnings are working-class has happened, and to blame pop for it is really stupid. I don't think pop could have helped being affected by it, which it was, and I don't think pop could have stopped it. When it happened, it happened to society, and society picked up on bands it wanted to reflect that idea.

"Glamour is seen in this country as America. We just picked up on the normal traits of stardom, and as my musical angle has always had an American side, the two things fitted. England suddenly became like *Miami Vice* in the rain, and that combined with the quality of what we were doing. It all fitted together very nicely, though I didn't plan it that way."

George changes gear to avoid the elephant trap of modish generalisation that the champagne sociologists of the glossy magazines habitually fall into.

"You've always got to remember you're talking from a London and south-east point of view. The north doesn't look like this. Most of them don't have the time or money to even pretend. But, for most teenagers, London has not become a poor place to live. London has benefited from the whole right-wing idea. I don't honestly think that the people that are going to these wine bars and souping up Escorts feel that things are getting worse. They're not the people on the dole; they're the people that have got a few bob to fritter away.

"I used to believe that people were taking on these Americanisms as a form of escape from what was really going on. I don't think that applies any more. I don't think that those people have got the things to escape from, they're not the people face to face with the real problems. Those people haven't got time for all this crap.

"But it's hard to tell, you know, because I'm not in contact with it anymore, not even vaguely. I used to be in contact with unemployment and the way people thought about their surroundings. But it's very hard for me to sit here and judge that now; I can only guess."

George believes "pop has stayed in the realms of fantasyland", reflecting its fans and not guiding them. Television, on the other hand, actively promotes role models. Americanism George has quoted already; violence is something else. He was appalled to catch a recent edition of a well-known children's teatime programme which featured a clip from another show "that to me was quite distasteful – war-game stuff. People being killed on *Blue Peter*!

"I think it's quite simple. I was brought up when media still kept totally away from violence when it came to children. I don't think it would have made me scared of violence, but I find it repulsive. But if I was that same child now, I probably wouldn't find it half as bad – I would expect to see it. I sound like fucking Mary Whitehouse here, but these are basic things, genuinely strong influences on people's lives."

George also objects to how Dirty Den on *EastEnders* (broadcast on Sunday afternoons) deals in stolen goods and gets away with it, thereby legitimising theft to kids.

"I remember when I was about nine years old I stole things, and when I got caught I got a really bad hiding, but I was also humiliated. To me it was something bad. And through those years when I normally would have stolen had I not been caught, I remembered that humiliation, and it probably stopped me fucking up somewhere along the line.

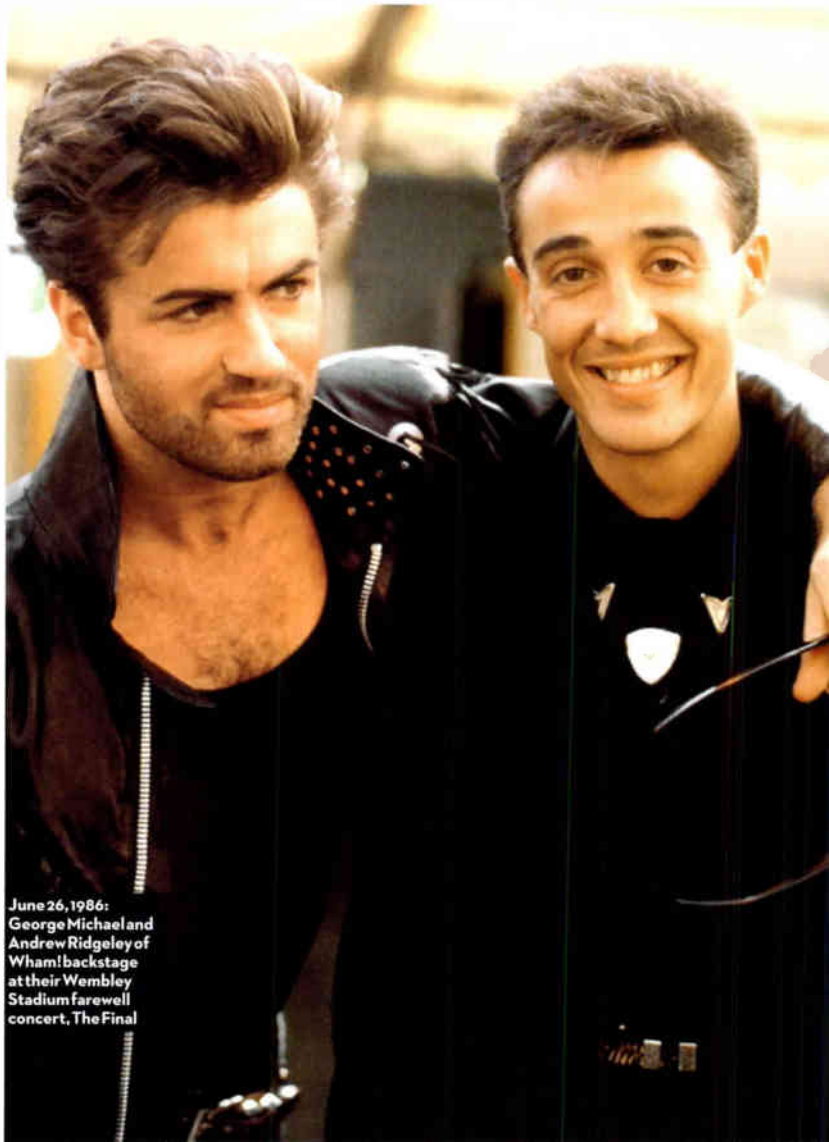
"But what I really can't believe is that violence has managed to come on so far, yet sex is basically as it was. Let's be honest, kids don't see enough about sex. Kids are ignorant and neurotic about sex, and it has stayed off the television screen much more than it should.

"Kids should be allowed to see much more sex in terms of caring and love, as opposed to porno. If aggression is in a child's nature, it's likely to turn to violence as an OK thing. It is legitimised by the amount of coverage. Violence is not something that is incredibly natural to people, but sex is. It should be seen as something a lot more natural than violence."

George Michael ate my hamster

RUMOUR HAS IT that the *News Of The World* has a George Michael scandal story that they're not going to run until his crown starts to slip.

"People do keep telling me there's a story, but I can't think what it would be. The *News Of The World*'s angle would have to be, if it's big enough that



June 26, 1986: George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley of Wham! backstage at their Wembley Stadium farewell concert, The Final

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

they're waiting, some kind of gay story. Either that or a pregnant girl. It's unnerving to think that they're only waiting because they think the public likes me enough at the moment. Hopefully they've got a long wait, and even then I'll sue the arse off them, ha ha!"

But can Fleet Street really damage a pop star's standing in the public favour?

"It can accelerate it terribly. With Boy George they accelerated it. If you're being cheeky with the public and playing with their affections, and the press jumps on you at the same time, you're beyond the point of no return. George is going to have to work fucking hard to get people back, you know.

"If a person respects the fact that the public has put them where they are, and if they don't realise the public have always got that in mind – you owe something to the public – you start mucking around with the reasons for your success. That's not to say you need to pander to the public. All you need to do is give them quality and don't offend them. If you feel bad about the way the public is treating you, just shut up about it – they don't care about the way you feel.

"You have to be careful with the public the way you have to be careful with someone who's had a few drinks, d'you know what I mean? You be nice to them and they'll be wonderful, you can have a good laugh with them. But if you annoy them, then you're going to get the worst side!"

Why Wham! split

ARTISTIC REASONS, HE says, and I believe him. He's mastered the craft of pop and now wants to give of himself, put a little honest emotion into his records that people can relate to personally. Wham! were about generational anthems, uplift and youth. George Michael will be singing to us one-to-one, and he can't do that if there's two.

But his reasons for splitting Wham! have been clouded by a slur thrown by his former management on his relationship with Andrew Ridgeley. This, briefly, is what happened.

Last November, George and Andrew told Simon Napier-Bell and Jazz Summers of Nomis Management that Wham!'s career would end this summer with a farewell Wembley concert, which decision would be publicly announced close to the time. Meanwhile, Napier-Bell and Summers were fixing a deal whereby the Kunick Leisure group would buy Nomis for £5 million. Kunick, however, are one-third owned by the company that also owns Sun City, the notorious Afrikaaner resort located in the black "homeland" of Bophuthatswana.

George discovered the connection by reading *Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety*, so the protestations of Napier-Bell and Summers fell flat – "You don't make a £5 million deal and not look at your shareholders, OK?"

So George quit his contract with Nomis and issued a press statement saying so, without mentioning either the South Africa connection or the Wham! split. Bad move. Fleet Street immediately got on the blower to Napier-Bell, who trumped the story with a far bigger one: George and Andrew had had a terrible row, and Wham! were splitting...

"Simon keeps reiterating this point about me looking for an excuse to get rid of Andrew. He keeps rubbishing our relationship. I'm not going to let Simon do that – he's always thrown such a cynical angle on everything he's been involved in. It makes it all look such a sham. If we weren't friends in the first place we wouldn't have stayed together this long. But if people's last memory of us is as two businessmen..."

Could you stop CBS selling your records in South Africa?

"Basically, I don't think there's anything I can do. I certainly wouldn't miss the money, but I'm not sure it would happen – how would you know? You just don't get royalty statements from South Africa, but you're not going to be able to stop CBS sending the parts or selling it there – there's no way you can check these things. I don't believe in empty gestures."

Could not an artist of your clout persuade other artists to join a boycott of the South African market?

"You're absolutely right, but I've never been able to do it. When we gave our royalties to Ethiopia last Christmas, I did it well upfront so maybe some of the other acts that had been on Band Aid might feel some pressure to do the same thing. No one did anything of the kind.

> "England suddenly became like *Miami Vice* in the rain"

"So I'm quite sure that if I tried to say, 'Pull your records out of South Africa', half wouldn't be bothered and half wouldn't want to give up the money. I'm resigned to the way people in the music business think.

"I honestly do believe that total sanctions is the only way. But I border between a realist and a fatalist. I honestly don't think there's any way Britain will pull out of South Africa, because the public don't care enough to put pressure on the government to do anything about it.

"I suppose it's fatalist to a degree, but there are lots of good causes that might have succeeded in the late '60s, early '70s that won't succeed today because, basically, if you don't believe your generation is going to support you or the public is going to take any interest...

"Things like Red Wedge are a nonstarter. I believe in idealism, but it has to be balanced with accepting human nature. You have to see the compromises people are and are not prepared to make, and the time when people are prepared to give.

"Paul Weller seems to believe that there are over three million left-wing unemployed. They're pissed off with the government, sure, but they're just as affected by the things going on around them as the people with money; they want more for themselves. And if they get the money, they're certainly not going to start spreading it about!

"I honestly think that Weller's not very bright, and obviously he thinks that I'm not very bright – he also thinks I'm a total mercenary. I was trying to argue with him on certain points, trying to introduce some idea of the limitations of his ideas when you bring human nature into it, and he wasn't accepting anything. And I was thinking, 'If this man is leading this party in a public sense, then what chance do they stand?'

"Dogma I've always hated, and right now that kind of dogmatic approach is totally damaging. All they did was cancel out any hope of any kind of social element that came into pop during '85 because of the whole charity thing. Any idea of working towards goals, I think that they've wiped it out again.

"The minute I saw the people involved, the same names, the same faces... I mean, they asked me to be on the remake of 'Free Nelson Mandela' – what the fuck is the point of remaking the thing, for Christ's sake? If you want to bring it to people's attention, why don't you look at what happened the last time and see how ineffective it was, OK?

"They should try a different approach, try getting new artists, not just plugging the old Red Wedge corner. I mean, remaking the same fucking song – how short-sighted can you be?"

The man with his finger on the popular pulse sighs at the communications gap between the consumerised crowd and its pie-in-the-sky saviours.

"It's conceit, but I think I can see society better than a lot of those people can. Maybe it's people like me who should be doing something about it. But the people who can see what's going on, who look at society in a very wide sense, think that the world is so fucked anyway, and that people are too apathetic to do anything about it. You look at the acceleration of all the negatives compared to the positives, and you just have to say it's all going to finish. We have to be drawing ourselves to the end of our natural lifespan, because we're fucking everything up..."

You mean mankind's story has a big exclamation mark at the end?

"Oh yeah. I have no belief in the Bible or religion, but I think Armageddon was a lucky guess. I honestly think it's going to happen..."

WHAM!

We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when...

Epilogue

"I THINK EVENTUALLY I'll look back and say that these were probably the most exciting two years I've ever had. But to go on like this would drive me absolutely crazy. I'm getting older, you know, so I've got to replace it with something more valid to the way I feel.

"Having said that, I wouldn't take back any of the last two years. Apart from some of the videos and haircuts, I don't think I've made any wrong moves, ha ha!" *Mat Snow* •

Prince brings the Parade Tour to Wembley Arena, August 12–14, 1986

ALBUMS REVIEW 1986

ALBUMS

Prince Parade PAISLEY PARK

They used to say the genius of Hendrix was that his guitar acted as an extension of his total being, that he agonised and fantasised through that axe. Well, the same applies to Prince – everything he treats has a Midas touch, a litmus feel for the most effective groove, an intuitive thrust at the erogenous zones where the physical and spiritual collide in orgasm.

"No one plays the clarinet the way you play my heart," swoons the precocious one over a beauteous, humping beat and the equation between music and emotion is sealed with a "Kiss". This LP, ladies and gentlemen, is alive.

I believe Prince is currently pop's greatest operator, a wizard, a true star. He's calculating and innocent – one eye tearful, coy, expressing hurt; the other cocked, laughing, coquettish, showing off.

And, of course, sex is his sacred plaything. He's Freudian beyond fault and fabrication and there's a shocking intelligence working us up into a lather inside these songs – hand-jobs, yet the pure effusions of a man-child wide-eyed and naked with wonder.

They're amoral in that lust and love, pleasure and pain, are indistinguishable; immoral in that he's aware of the dandy outrage of it all; and boldly hedonistic in that Prince advocates all experience enriches life. As he screams in ecstasy here: *"I want to live life to the ultimate high."* So *Parade* is a soft-porn paradise, a sensual sacrament, supposedly the soundtrack to our doe-eyed hero's next exhibition of narcissism on film.

The first side's well weird, nursery-rhyme songs subjected to sensory overload. Prince luxuriates in submitting himself to his senses, whether he's evoking *Sgt Pepper* in the symphonic collage of "Christopher Tracy's Parade", trying on machismo in the cocky "New Position", crooning like a camp Valentino in the gorgeously melodramatic *Under The Cherry Moon* or turning tricks through the psychedelic funk circus riot of "Life Can Be So Nice". And Side Two, if anything, is more illicit, more abandoned to delight.

"Kiss", of course, is perfection – Bo Diddley, Curtis Mayfield, Marc Bolan and Jayne Mansfield licking off their fingers after something good and dirty. "Do U Lie" is delightfully daft cosmic vaudeville, wigged and powdered and rustling in velvets.

And then there's the finale, this LP's "Purple Rain", "Sometimes It Snows In April", an acrobatic ballad that employs the simple sentimentality of country music to express deep loss so poetically, so personally – it's indecent when his vocal spirals into luscious grief, celebrating the sadness to the very last sob.

I've heard tell that, while I've been under this spell, lesser mortals have been saying dull things about revivalism and Beatles fetish. Such cold fish don't deserve the privilege of your time, because when all's said and done, when you're panting on the pillow, when the incense has cleared and you're catching your first sweet breath from this glorious vertigo, you'll realise *Parade* eclipses everything else you've heard this year.

Seriously, godlike.

Steve Sutherland, MM Apr 12

Dwight Yoakam Guitars, Cadillacs, Etc, Etc REPRISE

If it's careening kick-start country you need, a whisky-wise distillation of old forms, come round here. Boisterous fiddle, the pound and pounce of six-string bass, golden-veined spiral of pedal steel, joyous twang of Telecaster, screwback heart sob and curlicue cries from the man at the mic. Even the best of the new breed are too high, clear and pure to garner this much bawdy dirt and wild life in their stride. But Yoakam, a Kentuckyian based in Los Angeles, is more than a retrograde throwback. He uses his revibe of Nashville's pre-antiseptic studio-bound sound in songs which are among the smartest and most poignant to be added to the genre in a long while. Others go in for puny pastiche or ironic distance, but Yoakam takes on the legacy of the roughshod, fated, barroom troubadour unselfconsciously and with total conviction.

It's one of my pet theories that the country music of the '40s and '50s was forged against a backdrop of great change and upheaval when many were unable to reconcile their past with the confusion of the future – hence the melancholy, the quest for ethereal uplift, liquor anaesthetic, solace sought in drifting and party hoedowns.

Yoakam's songs are crafted and tuned to that spirit – his "It Won't Hurt" is the best recreation of a sorrowing boozer's woman trouble since Merle Haggard's "Swinging Doors". "South Of Cincinatti" is my favourite, a tale of love lost between a cold, grey Chicago apartment where *"a cigarette drowns in a glass of gin"* and the southside of Cincinatti, where *"the dogwood trees grow"*.

Both "Miner's Prayer" and "Bury Me" delve deeper into the land and age-old mysteries. Here Yoakam uses the haunted, God-fearing gospel of The Stanley Brothers to carve a dedication to his grandfather (a miner for 40 years) on the former and writes everyman's epitaph on the latter, where he duets with Maria McKee.

Most satisfying, these songs when played back to back with his covers of "Ring Of Fire" and "Heartaches By The Number", sound just as timeless and irrefutable, like they've always been there, waiting to be discovered. Proof, if more is needed, of Yoakam's craft, mastery and future potential.

Gavin Martin, NME Apr 26

PRINCE AND THE REVOLUTION / PARADE

NILS JORGENSEN / REX FEATURES

Sting Bring On The Night A&M

Renewed enthusiasm may have been the spur for Sting's world tour and mating with

The Mission: (l-r) Simon Hinkler, Craig Adams, Mick Brown and Wayne Hussey

pedigree jazzers last year, but the release of this live double album and accompanying film suggests willingness to milk the venture for all it's worth.

A conundrum in many ways, Sting is the lovelorn pin-up with a heart of steel ("Every Breath You Take" was Buddy Holly made malevolent, and as good as anything the decade has had to offer) evolving into a new-age egalitarian; he's a humanitarian who parties with arms dealers, a small-"s" socialist managed by big-"C" creep Miles Copeland, a supposed intellect who bleats, incredulously, "*I hope the Russians love their children too*".

Perhaps the new-style Sting, as presented in these reworkings of lesser-known Police sides and the pious, social conscience songs from *Dream Of The Blue Turtles*, is hoping to widen his listener's expectations, maybe even challenge old beliefs and allegiances, but it's hard to see where. *Bring On The Night* has a propriety and uniform correctness of sound and attitude that forgoes any sense of challenge or risk-taking.

All the big issues – from post-holocaust paranoia (title track), to world poverty ("Driven To Tears"), to Soho skag shooting as the present-day instalment of history's wastelands of youth ("Children's Crusade") – are tackled here. Sting pins the songs on righteousness, but he's too wistful and idealistic to extrapolate the anger and urgency of his emotional responses.

The group seem similarly locked in the groove of cliche and platitudes, many of the songs are simply played out far too long and the hot-air finales suggest that the format is too ambitious or at least ill-fitting for them.

Certainly, "Tea In The Sahara" off *Synchronicity* is needlessly embellished, "Demolition Man" delivered as a fit of minor pique almost cracks under the strain, while the segue of "One World"/"Seventh Wave" would be a crass eulogy to mankind's togetherness (more amnesia than Amnesty International) no matter how short or who played it.

I prefer him when he's unwinding an erotic, enchanted fantasy like "Moon Over Bourbon Street" than trying to target the big imponderable problems, setting off through a maze of media, literary and Sunday-supplement knowledge to define a soul music for the upwardly mobile Hampstead man. The latter may be uplifting for his own awareness and personal development, but it makes a piss-poor spectator sport.

Gavin Martin, NME Jun 28

SINGLES REVIEW 1986

SINGLES

The Mission Serpents Kiss CHAPTER 22

Born from the jetsam of The Sisters Of Mercy, The Mission's signature is all too familiar – a spider's scrawl on the tabernacle wall. Cosy guitar arpeggios coil around Wayne Hussey's low-slung drone, until suddenly the darkness shatters and the spectre of Andrew Eldritch's shades rises out of the black. The ghost smiles, shakes his head and slopes off into oblivion muttering, "The horror... the horror." *MM May 24*

Felt Bal d Of The B d CREATION

Lawrence of Felt is supposed to be some sort of reluctant cult hero and frustrated star. This is clearly an unsatisfactory state of affairs: by all rights, "Ballad Of The Band" should be Top Three, and Lawrence should be an ex-cult hero and ascending star. Fresh and jangly and lively and up, up, up, this exhilarating breath of pop will lift your spirits as surely as a sunny day. I like to imagine that if a young Bob Dylan had written "New Morning" in 1986, it might have come out sounding something like this. Alarmingly, the press release explains that we have here "the saddest song you'll ever hear", which might well prove to be the case if it were possible to decipher the lyrics. Since it's not, just file under J for joy, and jump. *MM Jun 14*

Queen Fr Will F EMI

Friends will be friends, and the record itself is like one of them. You shake hands and you know straight away it's got nothing up its sleeve. It is what it appears to be, and that, for better or for worse, is the usual Queen identikit hit with all of its attendant rabble-rousing flamboyance and melodrama. They're gonna love it on the terraces. *MM Jun 14*

Talk Talk Give It Up PARLOPHONE

Secretly, I've spent many a quiet hour with the ravishing Talk Talk album, one of those really great records that sneaks up on you unawares to become a family favourite. This band are so clever and so understated, full and rich, with a textural style that is never loud or jarring but relies on intricacy and sensuality to convey its delicate flavour. It's my humble opinion that Talk Talk are a pocket of unsung genius in this often-uninspired realm of pop. Let the single swirl around you as a taster of their infinite variety. *MM May 10*

Sam Cooke Nigh t RCA VICTOR

Words are not enough... sublime. *MM May 10*

Furniture nt M nd STIFF

This one is fascinating, keeps drawing you back to play it and has the same individual interest that the recent It's Immaterial single displayed so well. You don't have to conform with pop formulae to get into the charts, and I'm hoping this'll be the next outsider to join the ranks of the young, beautiful and famous.

Quite simply, this is perfect pop music with one fabulous hook line ("*You must be out of your brilliant mind*") and a supporting cast of strings, sax and swirling effects that touch the response nerve in all the right places. I hope it's a huge hit. *MM May 10*

ILPO MUSTO / REX FEATURES

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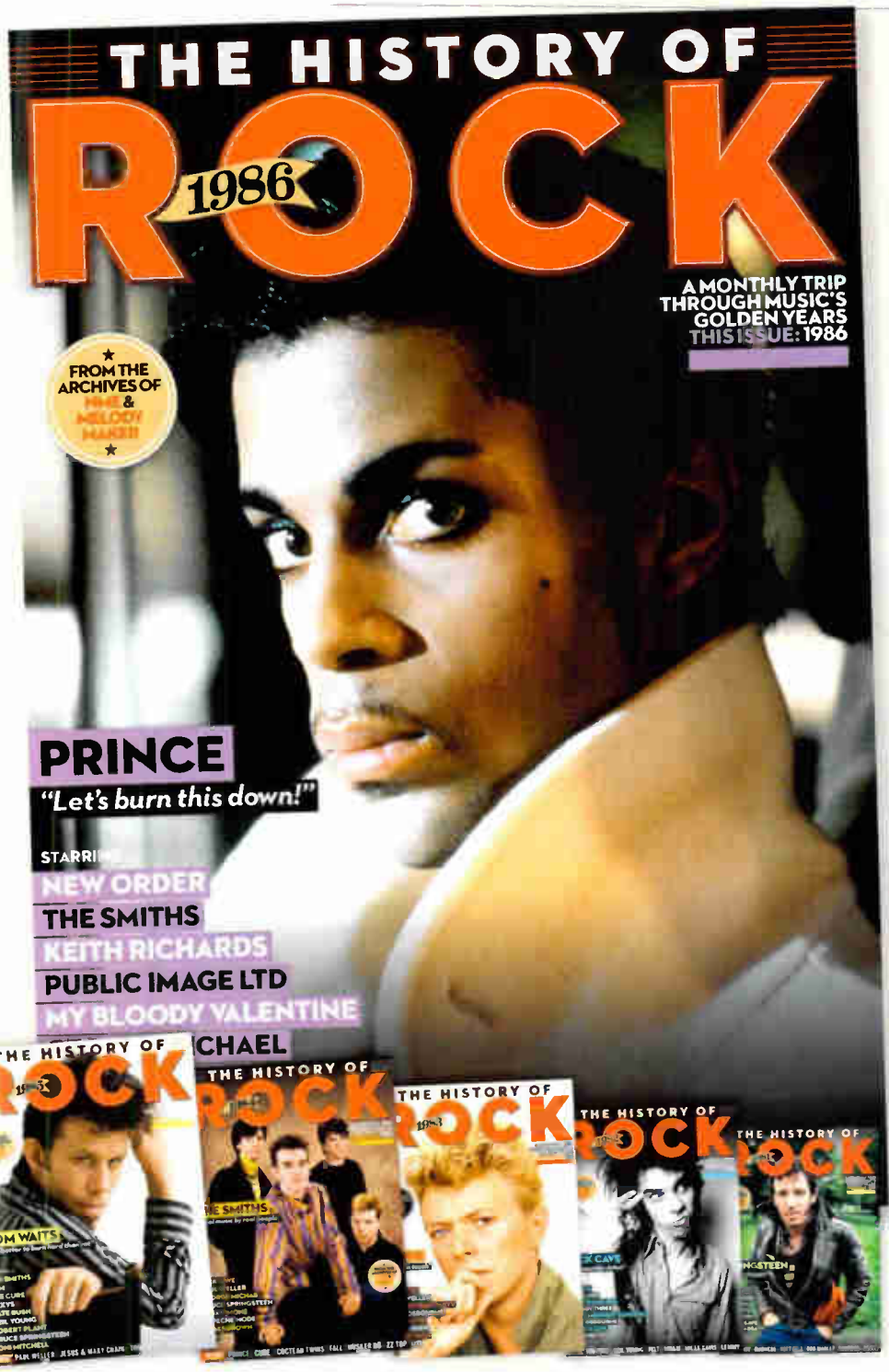

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NEED ANY BACK ISSUES? SEE PAGE 144

Readers' letters

MM/NME JAN–JUN Red Mick ridiculed, SSS slated, Femmes violently defended...

Simply uncred

Regarding Mick Hucknall of Simply Red undergoing the *MM* psycho surgery, could I suggest that any surgery carried out on this dickhead be by the removal of his head from up his bum. Just like dear Mick doesn't give a shit about John Peel and his radio show these days, I would think that anyone with even the slightest bit of taste in music doesn't give two shits about his wanky little band or, for that matter, his opinions.

Whether he likes it or not, Peel is still the only real outlet for the many young and enthusiastic bands that are often to be found in each and every town churning out some fine sounds that are as vital as punk was a decade ago. I just find it a pity that such "grown-up" groups as Simply Red occupy the daytime airwaves and prevent these bands from getter the airplay they so obviously deserve. **STEWART, Paisley, Scotland (*MM* Apr 5)**

Wedge of darkness

Red Wedge – so that's what it's called these days when the young lions set out to change the world. The return of the angry young man? Jimmy Porter and Arthur Seaton live on in Paul Weller and Chris Dean. Phil Ochs didn't die, he had a face-job and changed his name to Billy Bragg.

The *MM* ran articles like your Wedge piece in the early '70s. They were called "Politics And Rock" and were chaired by Richard Williams. Trouble is, songs about power and politics are meaningless. People are not moved by protest but by little things they can understand. That's what the best songs are about – feeling alone in a crowd, things that most people feel. **OLIVER TEMPRELL, Mansfield (*MM* Feb 15)**

Knight errant

The real reason why Mr Bob Geldof got nothing in the New Year's Honours has less to do with his birthplace and more to do with the fact that he tackled Mrs Thatcher last year about her butchery of the Overseas Aid budget. The youth of Britain can now see clearly that, far from supporting Live Aid, Mrs Thatcher and her cabinet are actively against social aid both at home and abroad. This, coupled with the government's refusal to introduce policies that would reduce unemployment, will rebound on the Tories, come the next general election – with or without tax cuts. **Michael Morrissey, London NW1 (*NME* Jan 18)**

Sputnik mission

Re: The future of rock'n'roll. How can someone whose only credentials are that he once played bass with a dodgy new wave band back in good ol' '76 now expect us to believe in his press release? (Which, by the way, both you and *Sounds* printed word for word masquerading as articles on Sigue Sigue Sputnik.)

The 10-year cycle of youth culture/music rebellion is unfortunately going to be proved a fallacy this time round, simply because the fans, musicians, industry and press have been anticipating it since the demise of the Pistols. None of the above would recognise it if it pissed in their collective faces.

The only hope is that somewhere far away from all this bullshit, someone is waiting to give the industry a kick up the arse. It won't be Sigue Sigue Sputnik; the revolution, as always, will not be televised. More's the pity.

"Young" Tony James has attacked everything except people over 30 (if it's too loud, you're too old, etc). Could it be that Mr James himself is 33? Blimey, he's the same age as Jimmy Thunders! I rest my case. If you dress shit up, it still smells awful – ask Marilyn.

What did we do before nostalgia? We made fucking good music! **DON CONKA, Biddy Mulligans, Kilburn (*MM* Feb 15)**

HURRAH! Hip! Hip! Cue the fanfare of trumpets. At last somebody has the nerve to single-handedly save the face of rock'n'roll. Well done, Tony James and the rest of the Sputniks. We're with you all the way. 'Nuff said. **THE SPARE ORGY TWOSOME, Walsall (*MM* March 1)**

Review from the bar

Did Ted Mico write his Violent Femmes live review before he went to see the band, or indeed was he even there at all? Their show at the Mean Fiddler was a vibrant ecstasy but this is an experience Mico is quite possibly unable to appreciate. [*Careful – Ed.*]

The Violent Femmes hypnotised the crowd with nearly three hours of non-stop excitement. If that is not value for money, then I don't know what is. Ask anyone except Ted Mico who went to the Violent Femmes and they will tell you – it was a truly religious experience. **CALEEN MAINSTONE, Bristol**

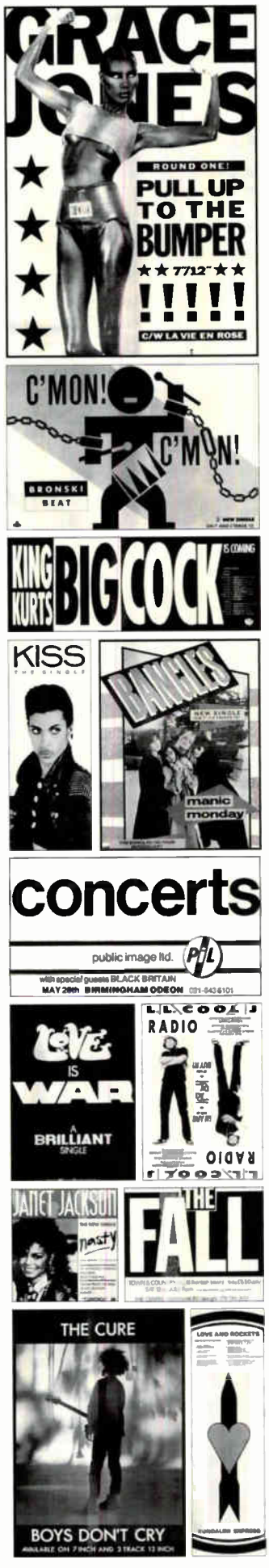
Sternly resisting the temptations spilling out of lines such as "vibrant ecstasy" and Mico's supposed ignorance on how to get drunk without alcohol, methinks you should read said review all over again, perhaps about five times, and then you might just perhaps see the light. **(*MM* Mar 29)**

New Musical Express

Why is it that the majority of letters are becoming increasingly concerned with political issues? Does this mean that the only letters worth printing are political? Does it mean that the only letters you receive are political?

I wish to know, from a music paper, what its readers' views are on the musical issues you deal with. If you write a political article, then it is understandable that there will be a response to this. More often than not, though, political letters do not reply to anything and are merely the airings of peoples' views, which is fair enough until it interferes with the music. I know the majority of the *NME*'s content concerns music and that means a fair proportion of politics deserves to be printed.

You have one page in 56 that deals with access – the views of minorities and feedback from your readers. If your letters deal with politics, then a fair representation of your audience's tastes is not accounted for. Surely this is not the only concern of your readers? **RUSSELL PARKER, Kenilworth, Warks (*NME* Jun 21)**



1986

JULY – SEPTEMBER

THE HOUSEMARTINS, MILES DAVIS, THE FALL, THE CURE AND MORE

ILPO MUSTO / REX FEATURES

The Jesus And Mary Chain: (l-r) Douglas Hart, William Reid and Jim Reid

JAMC back with "Candy"

NME JULY 6 New developments in the Jesus And Mary Chain camp.

THE JESUS AND Mary Chain return from voluntary exile this month to release their first single of 1986. "Some Candy Talking" appears on the Blanco Y Negro label on July 14. The seven-inch version has two tracks on the B-side – "Hit" and "Psycho Candy" – while the 12in has all these songs plus a new acoustic version of "Taste Of Cindy". The 12in version of "Psycho Candy" also has a different lead vocal, by William instead of Jim Reid. Just to complicate matters, there's also a double-pack containing the regular seven-inch, plus a bonus single of four acoustic tracks from a John Peel session last November.

NME SEPTEMBER 13

THE JESUS AND Mary Chain have parted company with their mentor and manager Alan McGee. McGee, the founder of Creation Records, "discovered" the Mary Chain in mid-1984 while running a London club, The Living Room. While no one else seemed impressed with the group's first drunken performances, McGee instantly proclaimed them "classic" and has propelled them to their present status as major-label cult heroes around the world.

Last weekend, McGee confirmed that he was no longer their manager, but he refused to comment further.

The Mary Chain are believed to be spending the rest of the year writing and recording, with a second LP due in February. Some sources say that the group were unhappy that Creation commitments kept McGee too busy to also manage them fully.

1986

JULY – SEPTEMBER

Queen's Freddie Mercury: Knebworth will be final date of The Magic Tour

"Untalented boys. A rum lot"

NME JULY 19 Where's Bill Grundy now? Compering a punk night, obviously...

December 2, 1976: *Today* presenter Bill Grundy leaving the Thames Television offices after a meeting with management about the Sex Pistols' appearance on the previous night's show

A QUESTION THAT HAS fascinated post-punk minds for close on 10 years and even inspired a classic punk single – "Where's Bill Grundy Now?" by the Television Personalities – will receive a fittingly forthright answer on Saturday afternoon at the Factory Records-promoted Festival Of The Tenth Summer in Manchester.

As a mighty array of northern lights assemble on stage at the Greater Manchester Exhibition Centre – to celebrate the 10th anniversary of an epochal Sex Pistols concert at the Free Trade Hall – punk's favourite bogeyman will also make one of the most unusual public appearance of his career.

As event compere, Grundy – in 1976 the host of Thames Television's primetime chat show *Today* on the fateful evening when the Sex Pistols irrevocably entered a nation's consciousness – is hoping to use the festival to put his perspective on one of the most infamous pieces of televised pop outrage.

A blunt, rumbustious Lancashire raconteur and a breed apart from the gutless talking heads who pass as chat show hosts these days, Grundy was suspended by Thames for two months for his role in the *Today* affair. He left the company two years later and now works as a freelance writer from his home in Marple near Manchester. As far as the Sex Pistols go, however, he is stridently unrepentant.

"They were a very silly set of untalented boys. I thought they were rather a rum lot when I first set eyes on them at Thames, the four villainous-looking yobs. Of course, they were also in the hands of that master of hype Malcolm McLaren, whose real concern for them was revealed by the way he looked after Sid Vicious. That side of pop music has always been absolutely deplorable."

At the time of the *Today* episode, Radio One DJ John Peel said that if you were to take any four working-class lads into a TV studio, allow them to drink, make them feel important and then ask them to say something outrageous, you would get the kind of reaction Grundy got from the Pistols. Does Bill now admit to provoking the band?

"That, if I may say so, is a load of balls! Did you see the interview? When somebody says 'fuck' on a family show, what am I supposed to do? Get up and walk out? I told them that, if they were trying to shock me, then they could not do so. I was in the navy! Now, if that's provoking them, then I provoked them. I had a good mind to go over and thump them!"

Was it the most difficult live interview he has ever done?

"Was it buggery! I've been in television for 30 years and I've interviewed everybody from prime ministers downwards! The Sex Pistols were unusual, but they were certainly not as difficult as a politician who simply won't answer your questions straight."

Grundy agreed to compere the G-Mex Festival as a favour to his friend Tony Wilson. Given his feelings about the Pistols, is it not a little ironic that he should want to participate in an event celebrating punk?

"I see no irony or contradiction in it. I wouldn't like to be there too long. But I think I will probably talk for more than a few minutes about it – and in more abusive terms than people might expect." *Adrian Thrills*

"I had a good mind to go over and thump them"

DAVID ASHDOWN / GETTY, ANWAR HUSSEIN / GETTY

120,000 tickets sold

NME AUG 9 Queen wind up their European tour.

QUEEN'S FINAL CONCERT of their European tour, at Knebworth Park this Saturday (9), will be the biggest rock event in the UK since Bob Dylan played Blackbushe 10 years ago – with 120,000 tickets already sold. Gates open at noon, and the running order is Belouis Some 3.30pm, Status Quo 4.30, Big Country 6.25 and Queen 8.15.

British Rail is running special trains from London to Stevenage (do not get off at Knebworth Station) at 30-minute intervals from early Saturday morning (also return after the show), and there is a continuous shuttle bus service to and from the site.

"Over the moon"

NME AUG 16 Ozzy exonerated in teen suicide case.

OZZY OSBOURNE – who was facing a major court case, instigated by the father of 19-year-old fan John McCollum, who killed himself while listening to Ozzy's "Suicide Solution" song – was "elated, relieved and over the moon" after hearing that the Supreme Court in Los Angeles had thrown out the case against him.

"It was totally ludicrous to suggest that my music had caused this young man to commit suicide," said Osbourne. "Of course, I'm upset that John McCollum took his own life, but to blame me is typical of the hysterical anti-Ozzy US lobby."

The Smiths: EMI could get "up to four LPs"

"Could have a long wait"

NME SEP 27 Have The Smiths signed to EMI? Rough Trade don't think so...

THE SMITHS HAVE signed a long-term worldwide deal with EMI Records, but it may be some time before the moguls of Manchester Square can get them onto vinyl, particularly if Rough Trade have anything to do with it.

A spokesman for Rough Trade said they were not aware that the ink had dried on the EMI paper and that Morrissey and his men were still expected to deliver two more singles, and possibly two albums for the independent label: "We know they were talking to EMI, but no one has told us that papers have been signed. We've booked them into a studio to make another LP before the end of the year and we are also hoping to record a live album from their London Palladium concert next month.

"Another single, 'Ask', is coming out in October and a second is due very shortly afterwards. Any lawyer who helps sign a group to one label when they are still under contract to another is pretty ridiculous. EMI could have quite a long wait before they can release any records."

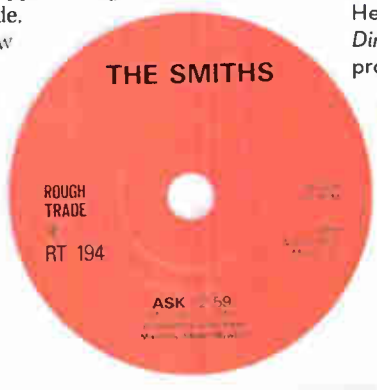
Differences of opinion between The Smiths and Rough Trade have been well documented, such as Morrissey's reluctance to make videos and the numerous behind-the-scenes wrangles which delayed the release of *The Queen Is Dead* for months.

EMI are "delighted" with their latest acquisition and see no major problems regarding The Smiths' commitments to Rough Trade. "Naturally we are thrilled to pieces with the news, which could mean we get up to four LPs from the group," said a spokesman.

"The contracts have been signed, although there are some short-term considerations with Rough Trade which have yet to be finished."

EMI have also signed Cabaret Voltaire, who are currently recording an album for Parlophone, to be released in the New Year. Rumours abound that, at one stage, EMI were trying to pick up four of the biggest-selling independent bands in the country by also approaching New Order and Depeche Mode.

The value of The Smiths' new contract is a closely guarded secret, although figures close to £1 million have been rumoured, possibly including a straight payment to Rough Trade to persuade them to drop their option on any more material. *Terry Staunton*



SHRINK RAP! RICHARD BUTLER

MM AUG 23 The Psychedelic Furs frontman is probed

Americans

My girlfriend's an American. They're really good when you get used to them.

Berlin

I think it's quite romantic, even though people come here for the plastic romance of the wall 'n' that. It suffers from melodrama.

Pink

The only work we've done in the last year has been on the movie *Pretty In Pink*, by John Hughes. Well, we have been writing, but the film's the only work we've done to get our mugs about.

The Rolling Stones

They used to be great but they're not very relevant these days.

Andy Warhol

Very important in terms of art history. And a nice guy. Bit of a screamer but... ha ha!

Chernobyl

I was in Berlin when it happened, only about 700 miles from the epicentre, so I don't know how much radiation I've got. You can't believe what you're told. It's frightening. I mean, I pollute my body by smoking, but there's always the option, and I eat healthily and I don't drink and the idea that somebody can come along and destroy all that is obscene.

MTV

I thought it was a riveting idea at first to have 24-hour cable TV, but it gets a bit boring because it has a playlist. It's not as adventurous as it was when it first came out.

Prince

He's great. I've been into him since *Dirty Mind*, a long time ago. *1999* is probably my favourite album of his.

Alcohol

It can be great if you don't do too much. Ha ha... everything in moderation. I used to do far too much and I was finding it hard to think clearly. I was getting a bit addled, so I haven't touched it in, oh, three-and-a half years. I wish I did sometimes, because when you're writing lyrics it really helps loosen you up. Socially it helps, as well.

June 20, 1986: Butler with the Furs at Glastonbury

Dreams

I always try to figure out how much you can analyse what they mean. I've had some weird ones lately, so I borrowed a dream book and what I figured the dreams to be about as soon as I woke up – which is what analysts tell you to look at – tallied in quite closely with what the book said, so I think maybe there is something in it.

Nightmares

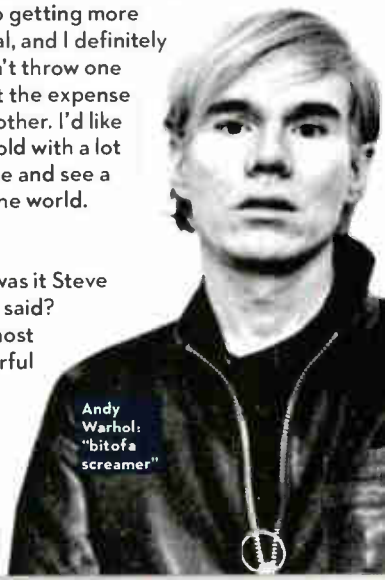
I don't have many terrible nightmares; I have vaguely disturbing dreams. It's been a few months since I woke up in a cold sweat. I hate those ones – soaking wet sheets!

Ambition

I'm definitely more materialistic than I used to be, but then I'm also getting more spiritual, and I definitely wouldn't throw one away at the expense of the other. I'd like to get old with a lot of grace and see a lot of the world.

Sex

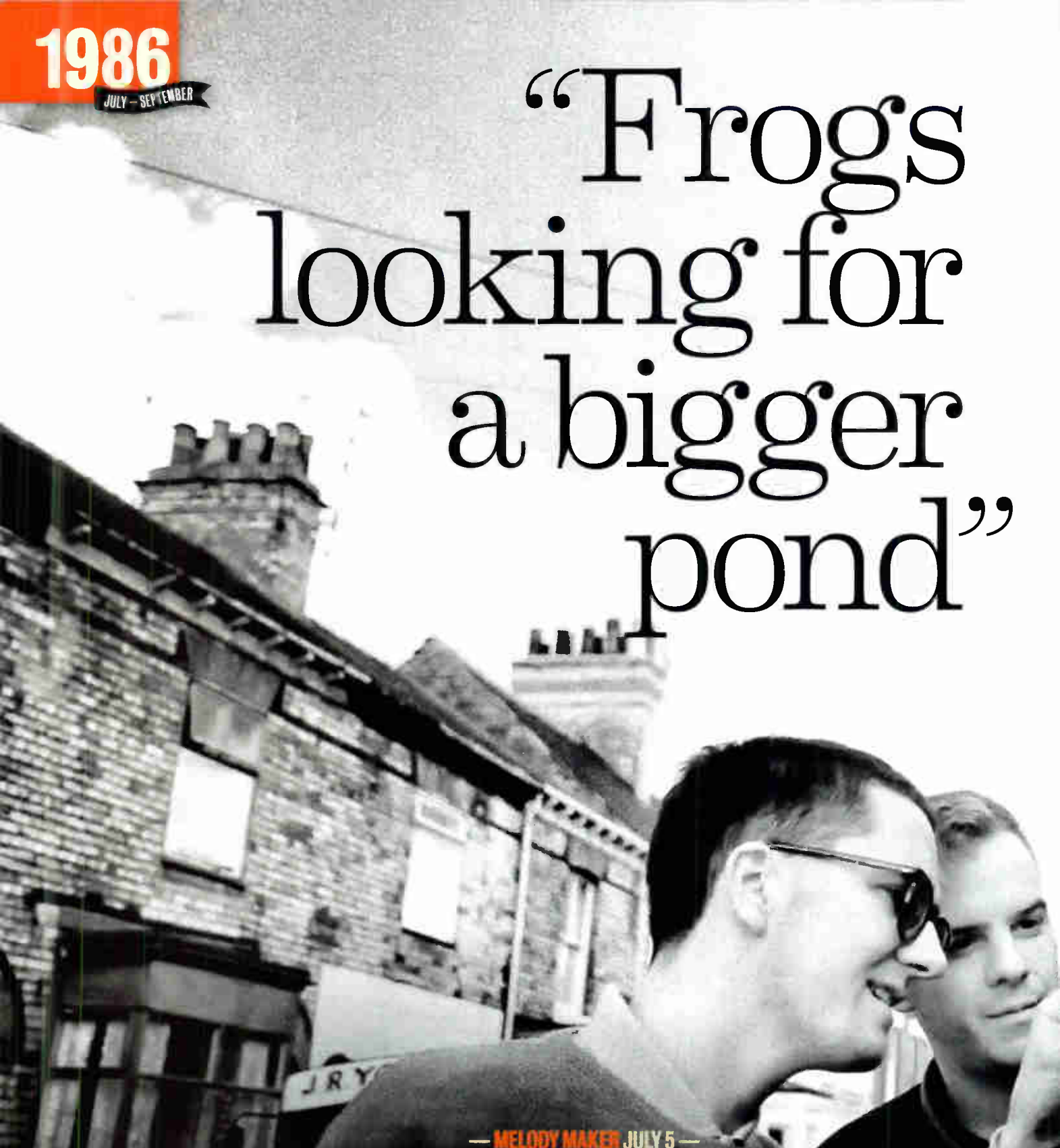
What was it Steve Martin said? "The most wonderful thing money can buy."



Andy Warhol: "bit of a screamer"

REX FEATURES, MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY, JACK MITCHELL / GETTY

"Frogs looking for a bigger pond"



— MELODY MAKER JULY 5 —

ELIZA IS A little squiffy. I know this because she tells Roger as much. "Roger," she says, "I am a little squiffy." Roger finds this information hilarious.

"Eliza, my darling, you look wonderful – have another Pimm's," he bellows loudly, his shoulders heaving in the glorious tradition of Edward Heath as he lurches round suddenly to send my virgin pint of ideologically sound lager down the cleavage of a rather attractive blonde in a black cocktail dress.

"Sorry chaps," he announces airily and disappears into the melee, frugging. He's a real wag, is Roger.

Boys as penguins and girls as wedding cakes – that's about the size of it. Balloons all over the shop, streamers, red, white and blue decorations ("Oh, we thought England were going to beat Argentina," says A Student defensively), plummy accents, squiffy Elizas, clumsy Rogers and things that go bang in the night. Fab. This is The Housemartins' first summer ball and they haven't got a thing to wear.

They slouch in the bar in their baggy sweaters and jeans watching incredulously as the flower of Britain's youth, the top five per cent of young brain power, dissolve into gibbering monkeys before their eyes.

Their single has just gone Top Three… they are bona-fide pop stars already wrestling with their consciences and desperate to hang on to their sanity and what happens? They find themselves in Hampstead (ideologically unsound Hampstead!) playing at some poxy summer ball for some poxy bunch »

ALAMY

THE HOUSEMARTINS, an anti-royalist band of left-wing Christians, are in the Top 10. At a gig for Tory students, the band explain the subversive quality of their unique position. "I don't think pop bands should own pop music," says PAUL HEATON. "It can be owned by good people."

The Housemartins in Hull, 1986: (l-r) Stan Cullimore, Norman Cook, Hugh Whitaker and Paul "Pd" Heaton

of penguins and wedding cakes. Bemused but professional, The Housemartins hang on to their sweaters and do the business. A Roger yells at Paul Heaton to take his sweater off. An Eliza screams for him to get his willy out. The Housemartins, never averse to baiting an audience, respond in kind. "We'd like to play this as a warm fuck-off to any Tories in the audience," snarls Heaton... which, considering half the audience looks to be a future Tory cabinet, is not a remark entirely without risk of physical damage.

A penguin, presumably a Tory penguin, dashes to the front of the stage wielding a bottle of bubbly and sprays the band. "That's typical of Tories," rants Heaton, "and that's why you're gonna lose the next fucking election!"

This could very well end in tears.

Later, somebody throws a red, white and blue fan on stage. Heaton leaps on it triumphantly and spreads it out for all to see. "If you do this," he says sweetly, tearing off the red, "look what we've got... Argentina's colours!"

A thunder of jeers. "Why are you all booing, we won two-one!" One lynch mob gathers. The rest are too pissed to get upset. The Housemartins are allowed to leave Hampstead unscarred. The happy hour indeed.

PAUL HEATON (VOCALS, harmonica, worry, silly sweaters): "We thought 'Happy Hour' would go Top 30 and I think we had some optimism at the back of our minds that it might get to something like 18 or 19, but none of us expected it to be Top 10. The video's made it, really. People in television seem to like the video. And it's a short song – that helps."

HUGH WHITAKER (drums, vocals and daydreams): "I've got a real buzz out of seeing it in the charts, just as a statistic. All the relatives are pleased... but the trappings that go with it, I don't go for at all. All it means is you can play the game. We like to surprise people, but it's getting more difficult.

STAN CULLIMORE (guitar, vocals, glasses, insulting one-liners): "We prefer to be the underdog, basically. With success... can you imagine anyone really enjoying it? Deep down?"

NORMAN COOK (bass, vocals, philosophy and laconic humour): "Bits of it we're enjoying, but bits of it are really going downhill. Six months ago, people were coming to see us with open ears, but now they're coming because they've heard the record or seen us on television and they're full of expectation."

THE HOUSEMARTINS ARE a mass of contradictions. They are a sunny, straightforward pop band, yet their lyrics are deep, broody and very definitely ideologically sound. They put out snappy, commercial pop singles and then worry themselves sick about the consequences of stardom. They are Christians, but they drink and swear and like to boogie. They want to be subversive, but they seem like simple boys interested in football, girls and a four-bar beat. They wear terrible sweaters and look awkward on stage, but they are a brilliant live band. They are ugly bastards, but they are also pop stars.

Now that "Happy Hour" has taken off, there seems no limit to their potential. The first two singles, "Flag Day" and "Sheep", were both minor hits, but on their debut album, *London 0 Hull 4*, it's conceivable to imagine every track as a possible single. Confused by success they may well now be, but their rise thus far has been clear-sighted... Their slogans "The Housemartins are quite good" and "The fourth-best band in Hull" became more famous than they were.

And so they sit around a rather barren dressing room in Hampstead, squabbling among themselves, indulging in makeshift games of football on the patio, worrying whether it's ideologically unsound for them to be pop stars. Stan whiles away the time shaving desultorily. Norman breaks off at regular intervals to apply a stick of deodorant to his armpit.

Paul: "I think we've lost our way a little bit. Over the last few weeks we had our first bust-up. I've personally certainly lost my way... We're not crystal clear what we want to do any more."

Norman: "To bring in an analogy, until now there was one carrot and we all knew what we were going for. Now there's all these other carrots – bigger, fatter carrots – and we don't know which one we're going for any more."

Stan: "It's like now we've been elected, now we're in government and we're having all these squabbles."

Paul: "We were tadpoles, and now we're frogs looking for a bigger pond."

Dear God, kings of analogy already!

Norman: "Did you know that Ringo developed a nervous twitch because of all the pressures? He had to wear dark glasses to hide it. Not that I'm trying to say we're bigger or better than The Beatles, of course..."

Stan: "George Michael has developed this shiver, so he can't use a razor. Poor bloke... he has to walk around with days and days of stubble on him."

The inner sleeve of the LP bears the following legend: "A Christmas message from the Housemartins – For too long the ruling class have enjoyed an extended New Year's Eve party whilst we can only watch, faces pressed up against the glass. The Housemartins say – Don't try gatecrashing a party full of bankers, burn the house down!"

And then: "Take Jesus – Take Marx – Take Hope."

"Yeah... Bob Hope, Bob Christ and Groucho Marx," says Stan.

Nice try, but no cigar.

"Actually," says Paul, "we started singing religious songs six months into the band. We've always been interested in gospel music... I don't know if you could describe us as Christians, but me, Stan and Norman particularly always wanted to approach the band on Christian grounds. We're Christian socialists... We're certainly not church-going Biblical studiers, though I firmly believe in parts of the Bible and the Christian message..."

Norman: "One of the most rewarding things about the band is that, when you start talking about religion, people don't just laugh at you. When I joined the band, we did two a cappellas and neither of them actually mentioned Jesus, and I was a bit worried about how people would take it, but we could always say, 'Well, we're not actually talking about Jesus.' But now we've got the confidence to go out and for Paul to actually preach about Jesus."

Hugh: "One interesting thing about this is that we're talking about the wedding of certain Christian sentiments with radical socialism, not the C of E Labour party type of socialism. There's quite a distinction there, and people pick up on that. It's not religion, it's more like grass-roots gospel type of religion. As Trotsky said, the Church Of England is the Tory party at prayer."

Norman: "Marx said religion is the opium of the people."

Whatever... The Housemartins play a corking gospel version of the old Hollies hit, "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother".

By popular consensus, Hugh Whitaker is the "most eccentric" member of the band. At one time, he was actively involved in radical politics, which he regarded as his main motivation in life, way above and beyond the simple demands of music. This, after all, is a man whose all-time musical hero is Tony Bennett.

"Well, when I was 17, music was the thing I most wanted to do – I wanted to be Paul McCartney or somebody, and then that got superseded by politics and my playing in bands was just a hobby. This time it's happened more or less by accident. I used to be, not just indifferent to the band's music, I actively used to dislike it. The first demo tape we did I thought was rubbish, but then they offered me money, basically, and that made all the difference."

Interviewer laughs, sniffing a wind-up.

Norman: "It's true, honestly. We had to offer him a guaranteed amount at every gig."

Stan: "He's a musical mercenary."

He's also appalled by the thought that, any day, young girls are going to be cutting out pictures of The Housemartins and sticking them on bedroom walls. Heaven forbid, they chorus.

"At the moment," says Hugh, "we haven't a way of responding to success. No one's denying we seriously

The Housemartins: "We're Christian socialists, not church-going Biblical studiers"

CHRIS VAN DE VOOREN / REX FEATURES

wanted to get somewhere, but now we have and it's made The Housemartins something different to what it was before and I'm not sure how we ought to handle it. Presumably we have to contrive it more, but The Housemartins have never been a contrived band. On a personal level, the absurdity of me being a pin-up...

"Like today we arrived at the record company, which is a house, basically, and there's some girls waiting outside for us. Even we didn't know we were going to be there. And at Glastonbury we were signing autographs! I mean, we haven't taken any of that at all seriously, but it's become like a joke dream."

Norman: "My only insight in people getting success comes from films, cliched films about pop stars. You have all the bad breaks and then it all goes well... like *That'll Be The Day* or that Slade film... all the pop films... and it's like suddenly.... 'Jeezus, I'm suddenly part of this film, part of this plot that I'd visualised in my head', and sooner or later it's gonna go wrong.

Stan: "In a film that's two-and-a-half hours long, we're about one hour 15 minutes into the plot. At the moment we're still four young happy boys from Hull... but like that Beatles film, we had to stop watching because it got too depressing. There's a point you want to switch off, because you know it can only go downhill from then on."

Paul: "You get sick about it and then you get giggly about it because it's so daft and then you talk seriously about it."

Stan: "Usually your music suffers, so inevitably you are going to be destroyed by it. Power corrupts absolutely and money corrupts and a lot of success goes to you head. There are very few people who are rich and successful that you can imagine are good people. Very few."

Norman: "And there are the ego problems of the band. We've got quite a few ego problems already. People who are egotistical in the band are getting more egotistical and people who are noisy and blabbermouthy are getting more so. It brings out your worst points."

Collective musical likes, and therefore influences, include Al Green, Elvis Costello, The Beatles, Billy Bragg, Stevie Wonder, The Redskins, The Smiths, Style Council and – bless Paul Heaton's heart – The Fall. Which makes you curious how they can possibly entertain the idea of shrouding subversive lyrics in a pure pop structure.

There's a body of thought in the band that their follow-up to "Happy Hour" should be something completely off the wall and profoundly uncommercial, both as a statement of dissent to ease their consciences about becoming pop stars and to put a brake on their soar-away success.

Well, they may be with a wild and wacky independent label but I doubt if they'll be allowed to get away with that, even if they seriously try to pursue it. They have to be content pursuing their protest at the system through lyrics that infiltrate and double-cross. Consider, after all, that "Flag Day" asks hard questions about the morality of charity; that "Get Up Off Our Knees" is a furious indictment of the class structure and a bitter condemnation of the monarchy; that "Sheep" attacks society's conventions of orthodoxy; and "We're Not Deep" tackles unemployment.

Paul: "In gospel music, the church wouldn't allow them to use tambourines and there was a big speech about it saying don't let the devil steal the rhythm... And what they meant was that it's basically everybody's to use, and my attitude to pop music is similar. I don't think pop bands should own pop music. It can be owned by good people. It's our music... don't let the devil steal our pop music, because it's all we can write, really. We can't write any material other than English-sounding pop music."

Hugh: "It's a narrow-minded conception that hopefully we might be able to challenge that in order to sing serious songs you have to sound serious. That's how you let you audience know you're being serious. It's a conception that I had heard before I heard Paul and Stan's songs, but now it's indicative of The Housemartins' originality that we are singing serious songs. Our songs are usually political and critical in some way, but we do it in a way which is poppy, which makes it more of a challenge... a challenge for us and for the people listening."

Paul: "I've turned off loads of bands because I've gone to a concert and all I've heard is a really angry noise. I just can't listen to the lyrics..."

Norman: "There are so many alternative bands saying something, but if you look at straight pop, very few of them are saying anything. It's all love songs... I know lots of people who are ideologically sound and everything, but they're pop fans, they just enjoy hearing pop music on the radio. They're not serious music fans but they buy them because they like the music, but the lyrics mean nothing. A band like that who actually say something can get through to a lot more people. One of my favourite types of music is militant soul music... things like Marvin Gaye with a great tune and a great beat and meaningful lyrics... "What's Going On" and "Abraham, Martin & John"... Curtis Mayfield, people like that."

> "If we carry on being successful, we could become very tiresome"

Is "Happy Hour" a message song?

Paul: "Yeah. All our songs are. It's a mixture of two things – it's anti-sexist but the actual story is based in an office. That office type of sexism... that whole mentality of a happy hour and all the trappings that go with it and the continuous happy hour and the people who go for that sort of lifestyle."

Norman: "We had a letter from somebody the other day who said they'd been converted after seeing us. They listened to what Paul said on stage and gone into the lyrics a bit more and they'd been converted from a confused liberal to a socialist. Even if that happens on a limited basis, it's better than nothing. It's better than people like Sigue Sigue Sputnik having an influence over young children and them growing up thinking that making racist jokes is funny and that capitalism's a wonderful thing."

But socialism sells...

Paul: "No, I can't think of any socialist anthem that's got into the Top 10. It only sells on a very small scale in the independent scene. There's no backing at all from big businesses, CBS or Chrysalis or any of them big groups. I don't think they'd put their money behind a socialist anthem in the same way they'd put it behind a love song."

Would you ever sign to a major label?

Paul: "I don't think we'll ever sign to another label at all, to be honest. We don't want to say we'll never sign to a major, because attitudes change. We don't want to be dogmatic about it, but at the moment I've got no interest in making records through any label other than Go! Discs."

Norman: "The only way you can work honestly within a major label is if you're such a big star you can write all sorts of clauses in your contract and take complete control over what you're doing. If they can afford not to release your records, then you're at their mercy and they can water everything down you say and do."

Hugh: "My conception of being rich and still being a socialist took a severe knock through my experience of being in the Workers Revolutionary Party, where the Redgraves were very influential. When there were those allegations of sexual abuse against women members and I saw that the Redgraves appeared to be willing to ignore it."

Stan: "I can see us in a few months if we carry on being successful becoming really tiresome. At the moment it's a joke, but we could become very tiresome."

ONE THING'S FOR sure, they won't be in the New Year Honours. They won't be invited to appear at the Prince's Trust either. Last week *The Sun* dredged up a three-month-old Will Smith *Maker* interview in which they savaged the royals, and the inclusion on the LP of "Get Up Off Your Knees" reaffirms their attitude to the monarchy.

Paul: "In conservative terms it's very unfortunate, but we can no longer afford the royals."

Stan: "We're hoping for voluntary redundancy and natural wastage to get rid of them."

Norman: "Basically, we haven't got the beds for them. That's why they're getting married, so they can share beds."

Stan: "In America, God bless it, America's only got one president and one woman. Can we afford to keep an entire menagerie? I suggest we should burn the Queen Mother and... you know, like The Beatles used to chop their bedclothes into inch squares, we should chop the Royal Family into small bits and sell them to Japanese tourists..."

Vicious boys. Can we ever trust a fresh-faced pop song again?

As they wake up with their hangovers and their hazy memories of making complete tossers of themselves in Hampstead, Eliza and Roger may reflect on that and consider they escaped very lightly. *Colin Irwin* •

Gritty and confident

NME AUG 2 Primal Scream, The Servants and The Wedding Present launch NME's C86 tape at the ICA.

ICA, LONDON
LIVE!
JULY 23

AN EXCELLENT SHOWCASE inevitably overshadowed by the week's Big Event. No, not the fairytale preliminaries to the inbreeding of Ms Ferguson and her charming prince [The royal wedding of Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson, July 23], I'm talking about Trouble Funk.

Openers The Servants have already made one fine record and will make more. For now, however, their live incarnation requires an act of faith; you have to believe that David Westlake's edgy songs will, through either familiarity or longer sets, overcome an inevitable lack of crash-bang-wallop instant impact. As it was, their playing – grittier and more confident than the limpid beauty of their "She's Always Hiding" debut promised – never filtered much beyond the edge of the stage. Another act of faith; better to come.

Primal Scream – now a mere six-piece; one red shirt, the rest black – cantered through a set that may well have been their best yet (three words from front-fringe Bobby Gillespie is a triumph), but which only flared into real blindingness with its concluding 90 seconds. But what a finale! "Velocity Girl" is Gillespie's certificate of sanity, his proffered proof that he may not, after all, turn out to be the Pete Best of the '80s.

And between the two The Wedding Present – velocity boys, acceleration addicts, hooked on hurtling – were a revelation. Given that they make Hüsker Dü sound like the Swans on Mogadon, the wheels have been known to come off their set, rendering them a horrid nerve-shred din. But tonight, their blur of guitars – even the physiology-defying middle threes (no time for eights!) – were as note perfect as they'd wish; ie, not exactly. Fast (what else?), furious (wankers in the crowd), and very, very funny, their 20 minutes were breakneck brilliant, and their 15 cannot be far away.

Danny Kelly

KENJI KUBO, MIKE MORTON

Primal Scream's Bobby Gillespie and (inset) David Gedge and drummer Shaun Charman of The Wedding Present midway through a week of performances by C86 artists at London's ICA, July 1986

COOL IN THE SPOOL

NME C86

THIS YEAR'S MODELS

Yowsa! Yowsa! Yowsa! Five years on from our lavishly-lauded C81 cassette debut, *NME* is once again making a declaration of independents.

With the independent scene now in its finest fettle for ages, we have assembled a punchy parade of primetime pop starring 22 of this year's most crucial contenders. With almost all the tracks exclusive to *NME*, the C86 is a cool spool of stunning sonic spendour that already looks certain to go down as one of the compilations of the year. Just check the teamsheet below and post your order form pronto.

NME C86 – We've got a tapedeck and, boy, are we gonna use it!

Happy headed Lemon Drops. Photo Sheddyn Butcher.

SIDE ONE Primal Scream Velocity G ■ **The Mighty Lemon Drops** Happy Head ■ **The Soup Dragons** Pleasant Surprised ■ **The Wolfhounds** Feelin Strange Again ■ **The Bodines** Thereso ■ **Mighty Mighty** Law ■ **Stump** Buffalo ■ **Bogshed** Run To Th Temple ■ **A Witness** Sharps And Sti ■ **The Pastels** Breaking Lines ■ **The Age Of Chance** From Now On This W Be Your God

SIDE TWO Shop Assistants It's Up T You ■ **Close Lobsters** Firestation Towers ■ **Miaow** Sport Most Royal ■ **Half Man Half Biscuit** I Hate Nerys Hughes ■ **The Servants** Transparent **The MacKenzies** Big Jim (There's No Pubs In Heaven) ■ **Big Flame** New Wo (Quick Wash And Brush Up) ■ **We've Got A Fuzzbox . . .** Console Me ■ **McCarthy** Celestial City ■ **The Shrubs** Bullfighter Blues ■ **The Wedding Present** The Boy Can Wait ■

STILL AVAILABLE 'POGO A GO

August 5, 1986: Mick Hucknall on stage with Simply Red in Chicago, Illinois

SWEET

"You've got to go with these situations"

The soulful SIMPLY RED are making great progress. So, it transpires, is MICK HUCKNALL, who plays the loverman role as often as humanly possible: "I'm not really a skirt chaser, I'm a lover. I make love."

— NME AUGUST 16 —

THE LIFT DOOR opens and here he is, singing Marvin. He walks across the carpet towards me smiling his most likeable smile, pleased with himself and the world, light on his feet, perhaps even swaggering a little. One Red hand is tugging at the tangle of copper curls hanging across his forehead, while the other beats his cap, tambourine-like, against his tracksuited leg.

Keeping Marvin's beat. Pleased to meet you, we both say.

"If you feel like I feel, baby come on, ooh come on." Mick Hucknall is serenading the Minneapolis dusk. Out front of the hotel, the doorman cab-catching for us knows better than to bat an eyelid and *you're welcome*'s us on our way to a table at Ciatti's, an Italian restaurant deemed suitable for out-of-town hitmakers with a reputation for big appetites.

Unwittingly we sit down next to the State Of Minnesota's noisiest three-child family and, finding some privacy behind the wall of sound they create, begin a conversation which drifts inexorably towards the carnal.

"Will you stop bouncing up and down, you naughty girl?"

This is an exasperated mother speaking from the adjoining table, not Mick. He's too busy telling me about the masseuse he met a couple of shows back on Simply Red's current US tour, whose offer of a free demonstration of her professional skills caused him to miss the tour bus to LA. They'd met up after the show and, for want of somewhere better, had taken the first road out of town in search of a quiet spot...

Mick paints a picture of a balmy night, a deserted roadside, dark but for the glow of the headlights, silent but for the sound of the car »

PAUL NATKIN / GETTY

SURRENDER

radio. He is coaxed out of his shirt and on to the soft grass to receive these expert ministrations, then all of a sudden… nothing. Darkness. Silence. Nothing.

A flat battery can put even the most zealous masseuse off her stride, particularly when it happens three miles out of town and a quick sprint is the only way of making it back to the departing tour bus. "It was alright for her 'cos she was real fit, but I was stopping every 200 yards saying, 'I don't think we need to rush this much, do you?'" Mick grins a winning Red grin and catalogues the outcome, a missed coach, a night on a choppy waterbed and a morning flight to rejoin the band. *C'est la vie.*

The reporting of this anecdote isn't evidence of some new Get Smutty editorial policy or of any previously suppressed desire of my own to work for *The National Enquirer*. It's just a matter of noting a fact that everyone in the Red camp take for granted – Mick Hucknall is a very gregarious sort of guy.

"He gets terribly irritable if he isn't getting it every day," observes one crew member unprompted the following evening. "Ask anyone."

But I found I didn't need to ask – only to watch and listen. Minutes later, the tour manager was to pass by with the news that Mick's planned interview in Chicago two days hence had been cancelled, that he'd no longer need to stay an extra night there alone and so could travel with the rest of the crew on the bus. "Oh God, fix him up with another interview quick," pleaded one band member in mock horror. "Please. He'll be terrible if he doesn't get his, er, sleep."

"So Mick, you're a bit of a lad, then?" I venture, pouring him an encouraging glass of wine.

"I'm not really a skirt chaser, I'm a lover. I make love." He waves his fork at me in illustration of this semantic difference. "The women I know see that distinction and I have great times with them. I have really strong relationships with women and I prefer their company to men's, but I think I was much crazier when I was 18 than I am now."

He's obviously the original for *The Man Who Loved Women*. He tells me variously how he despises the 14-year-olds-in-the-shower groupie mentality of many touring rock bands, objects to the subservient role dealt to women by most religious creeds, and strives for honesty in all his relationships, cutting through the double-standard bullshit that allows male musicians to strut their stuff around the world while wives or girlfriends wait faithfully at home. Uh-huh?

"I can't stand the ambiguity, the lies," he says with force. "But fortunately for me I'm not tied, which means I have good relationships. Every single girl I know (Know? *Know*), I'm completely honest with, right down the line. I tell them that I see other girls. If they don't like it, they can go home."

That said, it's a surprise to hear him say that he'd almost got married last year but had changed his mind at the last minute.

"It's postcards between us now. It's impossible."

But what if you had reached the altar, Mick?

"It would have failed," he says, unceremoniously. "I'd have been divorced by now. I've got quite a high sex drive, and if you're away from home for six months at a time… Well, let's be perfectly frank, you get women making it clear what they want to do with you.

"There's a classic Steve McQueen quote, when his wife found out about his infidelities. He just said that he got tired of saying no. Listen, if you've got a beautiful woman standing in front of you demanding to spend the night with you, you can only say no for so long. In the end, you think, 'I'm lonely, I'm really lonely. I've not seen anybody. I'm not bisexual and I can't get off on me'… People never see that side of things."

By the end of my two days in Minneapolis I'll be seeing it. In fact, I'll return to London thinking of Mick as someone with a veritable mission to ward off loneliness, no matter what hour of the day or night it might threaten to strike. But for now, I'm content to listen and learn.

"I don't know, maybe it's the audience we attract, but certainly the girls I know are very interesting people," he is saying. "They've got brains. They're not idiots. They've got their own careers and they're interested in me because of my independence. In fact, most of them are career women, doing their own thing…"

The wine is compounding with the jet lag – just two hours off the plane – to induce romantic notions within me. I picture Mick Hucknall stalking along Wall Street, brandishing his duppie (much maligned as a mere walking stick), and attracting a Hamelin-esque gaggle of brokers and bond dealers, purposeful young women in tight business suits and high heels, swinging briefcases and umbrellas as they pursue their sweet-voiced hero to his hotel suite. But I'm wildly wide of the mark.

"Like one girl I know is an acrobat," he is explaining to me. Impolitely, I find myself choking on my salad.

"And another is a professional chef, catering to really rich people."

That terrible old joke about the Australian's ideal woman being a dumb blonde nymphomaniac who runs a pub springs to mind, then scurries away ashamed of itself. But it's been put to me that, after music, the chief loves of Hucknall's life are making love and eating. How blessed that life must sometimes seem.

But now he's asking me about my own sex life, so we'll move forward to the moment when I pay the bill and we leave the restaurant, somewhat unsteadily in my case, on a quest to find The First Avenue, the Prince/Jam & Lewis-endorsed club where Simply Red are to play, spellbindingly, the following night. A cab is duly hailed and we are bundling into it when a small English sports car draws up alongside containing a fresh-faced young couple.

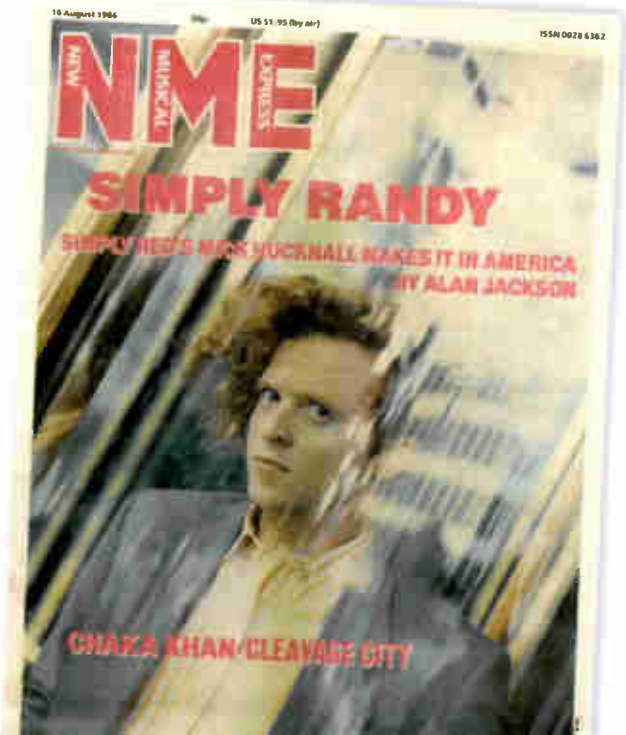
"Hey, aren't you Simply Red?" calls the girl. "Do you guys need a ride anywhere?"

Mick's pulling me out of the cab before the driver even has a chance to curse his lost fare. "You've got to go with these situations, Alan," he tells me. And straight away we're off into the night, the two of us perched up on the boot of this tiny convertible, our legs wedged in behind the two front seats, going with the situation at about 60 miles per hour in a built-up zone.

But at least we get there quickly. The club is little more than half full tonight, with a mainly white crowd standing round the bars paying cursory attention to the below-par band. My first beer confirms that I've already had more than enough to drink for one day, so I head for the door trying hard to remember the name of the hotel I checked into earlier.

For Mick the night's still young, though. After I leave, a young jock will come up to him and offer the opinion that Simply Red's music stinks. This won't go down well with Mick, who'll jut a pugilist's jaw and ask the critic outside to settle the score. The kid will back off at once, surprised, returning later to apologise. But that's still to come, and when I look over my shoulder Mick's all smiles, chatting to the girl from the sports car while her boyfriend looks uncertainly on. Whether or not a loneliness situation is developing, it's hard to tell.

> "I haven't got no social conscience. I'm glad to get out of that trap"



"AND I ASKED for the bill and they said there's no charge, thank you for the music."

America is falling in love with Simply Red. "Holding Back The Years" has just stepped off the Number One slot, with "Money's Too Tight To Mention" already racking up the singles chart to take its place. The album *Picture Book* is doing serious business, and all this exposure, all this success, brings rewards both expected and unexpected.

It's the next day and Mick Hucknall's rolled straight from his bed round to another Italian restaurant where he'd arranged to meet another girl for lunch. The food was better than last night and, surprise surprise, it came for free. This must seem light years away from those three years on the dole in Manchester.

"It's changed me, of course it has," he says. "If I changed I wouldn't be able to deal with it – you have to adapt. But the mistake is if you change your character, rather than just your lifestyle, and I don't believe I've changed that part of me at all. I'm still capable of having a bloody good time with the people I used to hang around with before. It's more that protocol, my way of dealing with people, that has changed."

> "If we were to re-record the album now, it would be a classic"

A necessary change. For all his open manner and lack of attitude, Hucknall isn't a man to suffer fools gladly, and life throws more than a few his way these days.

There are the bar-room bores who expect him to buy rounds for the whole world each time he steps into a pub, the ex-pat Brits who imagine he wants nothing more than to give away free concert tickets to the first non-American voice he hears, and then the professional scene watchers from London and Manchester who are observing his every move as if he were a stick insect in some second form biology experiment.

"I don't feel any sort of dilemma at all about success. When I go back to the pub I used to drink in when I was unemployed and have a game of pool, I do it because I like it, not because I've got some sort of social conscience about wanting to remain working class – I'll never be anything else.

"It only gets different if you start feeling guilty about it. I think maybe that's the trap someone like Weller has fallen into. He feels he has to have some sort of social conscience. I haven't got no social conscience. I'm glad to get out of that trap. It doesn't mean to say I've forgotten, but I'm out..."

And, as Paul Morley pointed out in that open letter to Red in *NME* some months ago, getting out can be the cardinal sin as far as professional Mancunians are concerned. Mick says he feels strong ties to the place because it's home, but not to the people, and he is derisive about what he sees as the time-warp mentality he has left behind, with its embrace of the indie scene and John Peel sessions as the acceptable face of success.

But he hasn't forgotten that he could have cut off his options 12 or 13 years ago when, by his own description, he was a beer-gutted adolescent in flares and a Ben Sherman, chatting up older girls at local nightclubs and stealing from building sites to supplement the money from his paper round.

"The way I look at it, I'm lucky never to have got caught," he says, suddenly stone-cold serious. "If I had got caught, I wouldn't be here now, I'm certain of that. I know other people who did get caught and they've been in and out of nick ever since. But one day I just grew out of it."

Perhaps that's why Simply Red has seemed so much of a one-man band to anyone who has not seen their live performances. His voice, his songs, his face on the album sleeve, him doing the talking in interviews – the group as an escape route out of Mick Hucknall's past. Is he really a dictator?

"Yeah, but I get results, I really do. A lot of the time it's for their own good. They tell me they want to be a group and I say I want that too, then sometimes on stage everybody's back there and I'm way out here. I say we're not going to be a group until you come forward and do something. So I'm a dictator to that extent, but I'm not self-promoting. It's very much for the band."

The move towards a heightened profile for the five other members has happened naturally in America, with press work being shared as far as possible and the growing confidence of Simply Red as a unit, rather than just a foil to Hucknall's voice, winning attention for individual musicians. Just how far they've come since *Picture Book* is demonstrated that night when they take the stage, immaculate in their Paul Smith suits.

A crowd well beyond capacity, some 40 per cent of it black, gives them a reception fit for heroes throughout a set piled high with memorable performances. "My God there are some gorgeous women here tonight," declares Mick excitedly as he moves from the opening "Grandma's Hands" into "Sad Old Red". Like all the tracks from the album performed tonight – current single "Red Box" included – its live incarnation makes the recorded version sound like a demo.

"We can wipe the floor with the album now," he'd told me earlier, and he's right. "If we were to re-record it now, it would be a classic."

The chance to set Simply Red's new-found excellence down on vinyl will come next month, when the band moves over to Compass Point, Nassau, to begin work with producer Alex Sadkin on their second album. Chris, Tim and Tony have already explained to me that they were attracted to Sadkin by his knowledge of reggae, unusual among American producers, and that they foresee a harder, more rhythmic edge to the new music.

Tonight, we're given previews of "The Right Thing", expected to be their next UK single, and "Infidelity", one of two songs resulting from a recent Hucknall collaboration with his hero Lamont Dozier. Also up for potential inclusion are covers of Bunny Wailer's "Love Fire" and Sly Stone's "Let Me Have It All", which, combined with a probable guest appearance by Anita Baker on a further track, bodes well for Simply Red's recorded future.

But tonight, the enhanced performances of *Picture Book* material are more than enough to win the band five encores, keeping Mick on his toes until the seat of his pants, much displayed to the girls down the front, is marked by two huge pools of sweat.

BACKSTAGE THE MOOD is suitably up, but not complacent. "What did you really think?" is the question most often asked. Fritz is dancing elegantly, Soloman-like, to a Miles Davis tape. Sylvan is telling me about his afternoon spent knocking on doors in the suburbs – part of his regular routine in any town now as a Jehovah's Witness. Chris and Tony are doing their duty with local radio personnel and Tim is striving manfully to keep a conversation going with a drunken Icelandic journalist. "Yes, I certainly like fish," he is saying. And Mick? He's dealing with a sudden bout of loneliness somewhere out back.

When he re-emerges he falls target for the kind of fawning he'd parodied to me the previous evening: "Loved the show. I mean, it was just so happening. I really love what you guys are doing, you know?" He accepts and deflects the praise with grins and shrugs, then moves off again.

Tim, the Angel Gabriel trumpeter, is blushingly recounting how a vast black man grabbed him on the way to the dressing room and told him he played better than anyone since Dizzy Gillespie. "I mean, really," he says with embarrassment, making a dismissive gesture with his arm. So yes, Simply Red are going to be well loved in the United States.

Talk drifts towards the subject of the next night's show in Chicago, and it's agreed a move should be made towards the bus, ready for the 400-mile-odd overnight journey. "Where's Mick gone?" someone asks. "Where d'you think?" comes the reply.

"The bus is rocking even as we speak."

I remember what he'd said when I asked him if the next album would have the same underlying current of social awareness – poverty, lack of opportunity – as *Picture Book*. "Yeah," he'd said, "there'll be some of that, and the there'll be some of the other."

"What other?" I'd asked.

"Women," he'd replied, laughing. "Women."

At 3am in Minneapolis it seems a fair bet that the other is winning the upper hand. *Alan Jackson* •

"More from the heart than the head"

An uncomfortable but very funny encounter with NICK CAVE. The singer finds rock critics so admirable, he has written a song called "Scum" about them. "I'm less and less inclined towards being colourful food for other people to consume."

– NME AUGUST 23 –

AMONG NICK CAVE'S most prized possessions is a hardcover green book stuffed with press cuttings and private observations written in his painstakingly spidery hand.

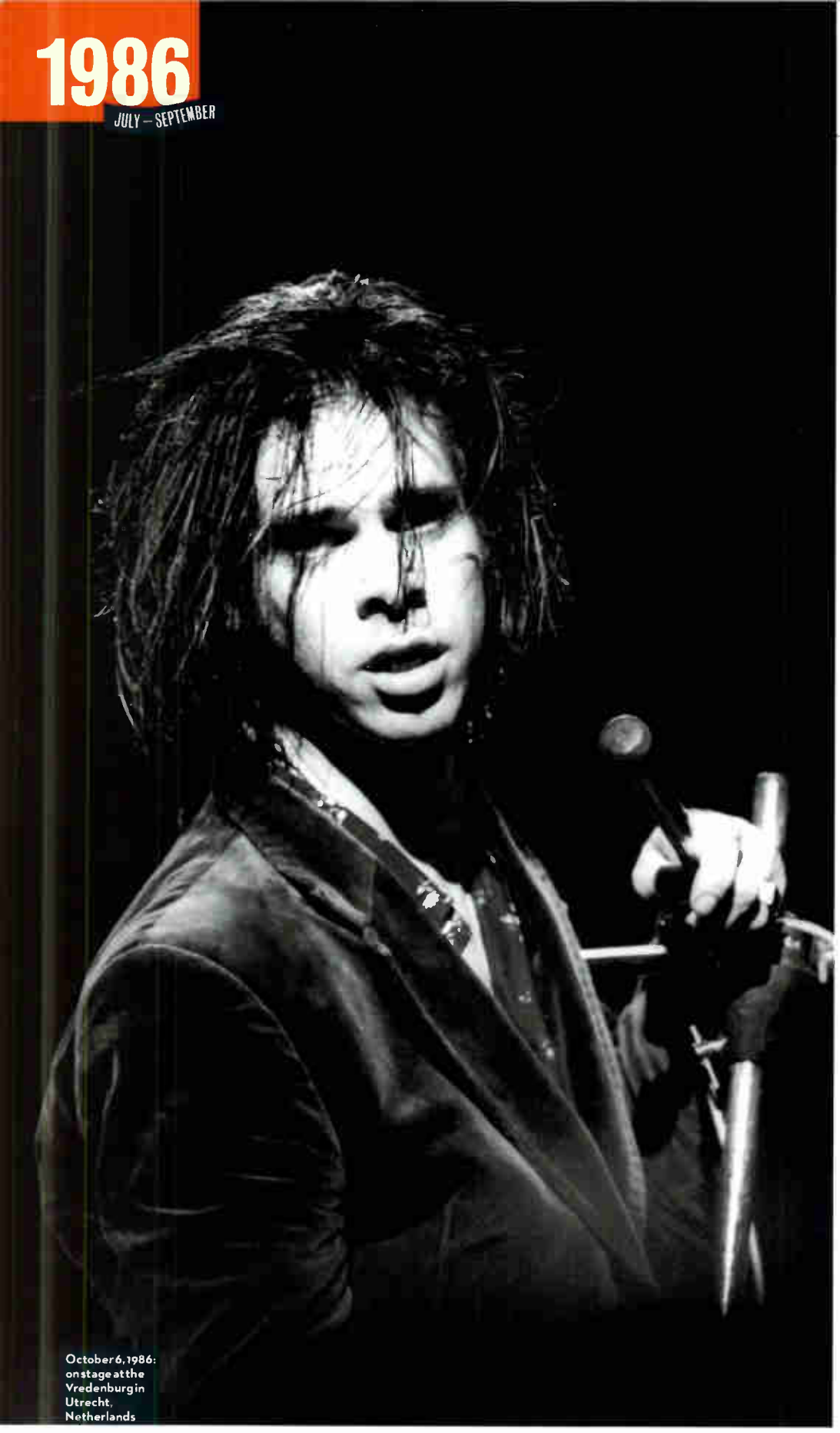
"There was an academic painter at the turn of the century, whose name escapes me at the moment, who did portraits of rich people and aristocrats, like a poet laureate. When he died they found a trunk full of other paintings he did. And they all were obsessed with one theme: the reflection of a woman breaching the pinking surface of a puddle with her stride.

"They were not particularly obscene, but it was obvious he was using his artistic prowess for other reasons than to portray the rich who gave him money to do it. And this is my book; I'm allowed to write as much about whatever I like as I want. Rather than living out »

BLEDDYN BUTCHER

PRICK ME DO I NOT BLEED?

Nick Cave working on his first novel, *And The Ass Saw The Angel*, in Bad Seeds drummer Thomas Wydler's loft on Berlin's Yorckstrasse, 1985



October 6, 1986: on stage at the Vredenburg in Utrecht, Netherlands

FRANS SCHELLEKENS/GETTY

the extremes of our particular fantasies, most of us rid ourselves of these desires in other ways – beating the wife, the normal day-to-day things. In this particular book I indulge myself to the limits. I don't have to show this to anyone; I don't have to worry about whether my mother's going to read it..."

I believe it incudes a song about the British music press entitled "Scum".

"I didn't write it about the press; I wrote it about you. See, here's a whole lot of scums. There's one; this is about you..."

He flicks through the pages, his pink-rimmed eyes not looking up once to meet mine...

"...You ...you. This is just a kind of pastime. I write hate lyrics really well. It's not every day you can use them, really..."

This interview is not turning out at all as I'd hoped...

I had hoped for an interview which would amplify how Nick Cave's preoccupations have been revealingly side-lit by his new album consisting entirely of cover versions. Called *Kicking Against The Pricks*, its very title alludes not only to the verse from the Acts Of The Apostles, but perhaps also to Samuel Beckett's borrowing of the phrase; certainly, a pun of Cave's own devising is intended. And I suspect I might be one of the pricks.

As he explains in his measured, dictation-speed sigh of a voice, "There's not a great deal of academic intellectualisation of the reasons why we did these particular songs. We're musicians and feel music more from the heart than the head. I'm not sure whether you can understand that."

Ouch.

"There was no round-table debate as to what each particular song means. When I listen to a song, it strikes my heart whether it's worthwhile or not. There's something so basic and so simple it shouldn't even need to be said."

What, however, constitutes that supposedly instinctive recognition of a song's worth is not so simple. On his new album there are self-confessed tributes, like his version of "The Hammer Song", originally by his schoolboy hero Alex Harvey, the piratical Glaswegian rocker whose Jacques Brel-derived theatricalism anticipated punk.

Missing from ...*Pricks*, however, are songs Cave loves which have already been fully realised elsewhere, offering no avenues for further exploration. Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks* LP is a case in point, though Cave reviles all his other records.

Likewise damned is Jimi Hendrix, whose rendition of "Hey Joe" Cave regards as an easily surpassable high point in an unappealing career. Not unlike Tim Rose's 1967 performance, which he heard only after recording his own, Nick Cave's "Hey Joe" invokes a brooding cosmic wrath surrounding Joe's *crime passionnel*, which echoes the heavenly portents which attended the birth of the Presley twins in "Tupelo" (a song where he now faults his own gruff singing).

These are details, however. Kicking Against The Pricks is a richly exciting, dramatic record, not only for the choice of songs and their singing, but also for the revitalising aplomb and, where needs be, restraint of their performance by The Bad Seeds, whose highly talented maestro Mick Harvey (also of Crime And The City Solution) is too little recognised.

Kicking Against The Pricks is, in addition, a further instalment in the remoulding of Nick Cave into one of the rock world's most striking and multi-levelled leading players.

For a start, Nick Cave hates the "rock world". Like fellow itinerant Australian musicians The Go-Betweens' Grant McLennan and Robert Forster, The Triffids' David McCombs, The Moodists' Dave Graney, and former Saint and Laughing Clown Ed Kuepper, he is highly literate about rock and its many sources, but inclines towards its most earthy poets of passion, the balladeers and storytellers. Johnny Cash and Roy Orbison – like him, men in black – figure large in his taste, as do Elvis Presley and Bob Dylan, whose late records Cave particularly enjoys, not least because he discovered them for himself amongst rock criticism's bargain-bin of talents supposedly declined into mawkishness and stupor.

Cave has sought amongst this canon those themes which most closely resemble his preoccupation – that of a jilted lover whose thoughts in abandoned desolation turn from regret to grief to vengeance. That the end of his relationship with his girlfriend of seven years, Anita Lane, in 1983 has inspired so much of his subsequent work has never been denied.

From that point, Cave has turned his life's big wound into art, and he has also plunged into that art as a safety valve. Not for a long time has a more poignantly tragic figure – one whose downfall springs from an unbalancing ruling passion – starred in rock's obsessively scrutinised zone where private life and public image overlap.

His gravity of demeanour and much-trailed affinity with serious literary endeavour (likewise a characteristic of those other aforementioned Australians) not only mark him out from the frivolities of the pop industry, but also bestows on him a substantial tradition in which his tormented desolation may find a home.

Now is the winter of our discontent...

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune...

Well since my baby left me, I've found a new place to dwell. It's down at the end of Lonely Street at Heartbreak Hotel...

Not for Nick Cave the battlements of Elsinore; he stalks instead America's Deep South, a larger-than-life corrupted Eden of hot blood, primitive religion, swamplands, scarlet women, quack sawbones, whiskey preachers, riverboat gamblers, white trash, slaves and the lynch mob. In fact. Cave is barely acquainted with the area. But then, John Fogerty wrote evocative bayou songs for California's Creedence Clearwater Revival without getting so much as within sniffing distance of an alligator's tail.

This mythical Deep South serves not only as the landscape for some of Cave's favourite music, but also as a backdrop sufficiently wild and impassioned to project his tragic image onto – an Oedipus wreck in winklepickers.

"I just think Mat Snow is an arsehole who said this, and it's not true. I find it I hard to sit down and talk to someone who gave us a bad review."

Tragic figures are usually proud – it goes with the territory. Petty-mindedness, however, tends to be comic. So how come neither of us are laughing? What had I done to poison this whole encounter?

In March last year I wrote of an Einstürzende Neubauten single that it "musters the psychodramatic edge disappointingly absent from Nick Cave's forthcoming LP". That's all, yet his grudge has stewed in bile ever since. Nor is my reassurance, for what it's worth, that *The Firstborn Is Dead* LP has subsequently grown in my estimation, of any use. At least I am not alone as the target of "Scum": also included are *NME*'s temporarily retired Barney Hoskyns for no reason I know of; *The Australian*'s Nicolas Rothwell, for whom Anita Lane deserted Nick ("personal reasons" as Cave wryly explains); and Antonella Black, who in an interview for *ZigZag*, portrayed him as a petulant, dribbling junkie. That all four of us have also heaped extravagant praise upon his work cuts no ice at all.

"If someone says something good about me, they're doing their job; I have no complaints. They get no medal, they get their wage. That's all. But if they say something bad, then that really gets on my tits. I'm inconsistent, I'm illogical, I'm irrational about it. So fuckin' what?"

Cave's voice barely rises. He's as laboriously patient as an iceberg.

"There are some people who will take it in good stead and laugh. But I take it as a personal insult and harbour it. And then that person comes up to me and attempts to shake my hand with a smile and say, 'Hi, long time no see, burbie burble burble.'

"Everything that's said against me offends me, whether it's true or not. I can't fathom these people who flunked their arts courses and became rock journalists and are too goddamned ignorant about music, or academic about their thoughts, or have so many hang-ups that they can't bring themselves to perform. Yet it is these people whose opinions are heralded and lauded as being gospel.

"Some arsehole will go along to our concert in a bad mood because he will have prematurely ejaculated with his new girlfriend and then been shoved around by a few skinheads, and consequently give the concert a bad review. And people read it and imbibe!

"It really boils my blood and makes me sick to think that this is still perpetuated and the same idiotic process continues of me speaking a lot of shit to some fool. It's not what I consider to be a day that I enjoy, a day that I consider profitable."

If, with few exceptions, Cave has scant regard for we earnest, backstabbing scribblers, he "doesn't give a flying fuck" for the other four-fifths of his audience, most of whom by my reckoning are full-time goths, part-time slummers, wallowers and weirdos who are there to be fucked up the dirt-track, metaphorically speaking.

"I've got less and less inclined towards being some sort of colourful food for a lot of other people to consume. Writing allows me to be myself and not have to perform this filthy function which, no matter what I do, is inherent in being lead singer for some freak group.

"I don't know what the people who come and see me are like. I don't know what their reasons for doing anything are. I don't know the reason for the boy down the front who comes to each of our shows and screams out, 'You're a fucking arsehole!' Pays every night to scream that at the group, and, if he gets a chance, to punch me. He's not there to pick up a girl, that's for sure."

> "Everything that's said against me, true or not, offends me"

Spotlights and the smell of greasepaint hold no charm for Nick Cave. Nor, he claims, does the money amount to much.

"When you've finished a British tour playing all these horrible places, like the worst prisons in America, and finding that type of person at every concert, after a while you consider, 'What's the benefit of doing this?' That person becomes more important to you than the rest of the audience. I don't want to be over-dramatic about it, but the whole thing seems to be an obscene comic strip..."

Sometimes, during this supremely painful interview, Nick Cave forgets himself and speaks eloquently and animatedly about something outside his immediate concerns – the American prison system, for instance, which he's been researching for a film project in Australia. When I ask about God and the afterlife, he becomes more guarded. All he'll vouchsafe is that he believes evil will not go ultimately unpunished, even if it's rewarded on Earth.

But he soon reverts to being the sod with a grudge and thin veneer of forced politeness.

"I'm just a sensitive guy," he smiles inwardly. Very inwardly. *Mat Snow* •

"The roof is on fire!"

PRINCE crashlands in London. Three nights at Wembley Arena confirm his status as a showstopping artist in the lineage of Little Richard, James Brown and Sly Stone. It's sexy, it's witty and above all it's fun. "Let's burn this motherfucker down!"

— MELODY MAKER AUGUST 23 —

THE WEEK WAS sheer hell. How to hang on to two Prince tickets until Thursday? Keep them in the office and they'll walk, such was their rarity, such was the envy of friend and foe alike. Keep them in the wallet and I might get mugged, some other dude sweating and screaming in my seats. Keep them in the flat and fire and theft or some act of God might deny me the big one.

Thursday. An age away. And what if I managed to secure those little perforated pieces of pure gold from all the pitfalls and He cancelled the last night? What if He came down with Montezuma's revenge after enrapturing the faithful midweek? What if He felt affronted, as He had when He flew in for the Rock And Pop Awards a couple of years back, and cancelled? What if He were shot or, oh worse, just didn't play on a whim? Christ, surely that was a strong possibility considering He was fruitcake enough to consider the Marquee a funky venue for an after-gig party-down.

But Thursday came as Thursdays do, and we made it to Wembley without a fatal head-on or a busted big-end and the perspiration and panic set in. What if the hype did its horrible thing? What if the expectation of a litany of delights forced every critical faculty into overdrive and unleashed the adrenalised cynicism that can often render spiteful disappointment?

Anyway, 8.20. A disembodied American voice asked if we'd please welcome Prince And The Revolution and we decided yes, we would, and howled so our ears hurt. From the South Grand Tier I could hear the snake-charming raga of "Around The World In A Day", but I could see nothing. The bloody curtains remained closed for one whole agonising verse until a James Brown soul squall rent them asunder and there He stood in studded bell-bottoms and Spanish Cuban heels, hair a greased-back '30s bolero crest, lips a fruity Shirley Temple pout, hips a pendulous Elvis thrust, smile sweet and wicked underrollin' Fats Waller eyes. Oh the eyes, big and bad as moons, Bambi and Valentino, no woman was safe. And the navel; the navel glistened, gorgeous and thin. We screamed. »

ALAMY

Prince in a lemon zoot suit, the second of several costumes donned during the London leg of the Parade Tour

August 14, 1986: Sting and Ronnie Wood join Prince for a rendition of the Rolling Stones' "Miss You" on the last of three nights at Wembley Arena

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

"Around The World" watusied an intricate metamorphosis into "Christopher Tracy's Parade" and The Revolution achieved with elegant ease what others appear to find impossible: exquisite efficiency without sterility, synchronisation with joy. For those of us reared on rockier ethics than the predominantly soul-boy and girl audience, it came as some shock to discover that there still throbbed a real tactile thrill in creation as opposed to chaos and destruction.

And what was He doing during these intense opening manoeuvres – tracks dismissed on record by the purists as the great man's psychedelic sell-out? He was hamming it up on the Hammond like Little Richard, all cute cocky grins and sugary snarls.

A brutally boisterous "New Position" lubricated the innuendo and melted into "I Wonder U" and His chest was revealed in one ecstatic flounce before He bowed out to return jazz-mutilated moments later in the white tux from *Cherry Moon*, wriggling into "Raspberry Beret", Jerome Benton and the other extravagant back-up boys Uncle-Tomming with Him into a ridiculously deft choreography of dance routines, grinning like born-agains, jiving like gigolos. I saw Astaire and Chaplin. We screamed and screamed again.

And then I wept. Copiously. The lights fell low, the band backed off and suddenly, vulnerable amid the razzmatazz, Prince sang "Do Me Baby" from the *Controversy* album. He sang like I've never heard anyone sing before; he sang about love and lust, about their relationship, about the politics of plonking. He sang as a victim and achieved coy command.

This man was fawning, for Chrissakes, standing there actually pleading with us to adore him, knowing, with all the wily power of his feminine charms, that he had us trapped right where he wanted us, suckered in our pity.

It was all too much for this hetero Anglo-Saxon boy and, boy, did I weep. But I nearly gagged out at what he did to us next; cocking a snook at our broken hearts, he swaggered into "(How Much Is That) Doggie In The Window?" like some wanton, uncaring tart, then wrapped it up into a harsh and chinky "When Doves Cry".

Seated at the piano, he paused and made eyes at the girls showering him with bouquets before he preened through a cock-teasingly slow first verse of "Little Red Corvette", twisting that around his little finger into the debonair "Under The Cherry Moon".

The show was now switchbacking around the preposterous range of Prince's talent; The Revolution were covering every ghetto imaginable and every syllable was His own!

Pirouetting, strolling, disrobing, blue, black, white suits, doing the splits, strutting that Broadway stuff, he'd done it all. And then there was "Head", the naughty fellatio celebration banned by the radio off the *Dirty Mind* album. Lying astride the mic stand, fucking perfectly in time to the humping beat, he did a little mock-macho rap, we giggled along and it wasn't cheap. Not once.

This was great theatre, great athleticism, great comedy all performed with the greatest delicacy. It was almost as if it were sacred when he grabbed a guitar and deliciously screwed it, licking the machine heads as he casually sat, bare-chested, on the lip of the stage and coaxed little flurries of loving jazz moans from the strings.

I would have cried again but I was rescued by the sheer cool velocity of the svelte "Kiss", that minimal gem of orgasmic Bo Diddley and the best single this year alongside the League's "Human". "1999" belonged to the crowd, Prince prancing, us baying.

Encore time and the only real doubt raised by His visit. Can it be that He, like any other mortal American, is stricken with such a paucity of discernment that he can't see that hauling Ronnie Wood and Sting on stage for a spirited run-through of "Miss You" (a song he'd said he wished he'd written when he played it at the post-gig jam at Busby's on Monday) is a decision lacking in all things hip? How could it be that this real and absolute genius was getting mixed up with mediocre old lags like Eric Clapton (Tuesday's party jam)? Some say He's a muso and lacks that vital taste, but I think he's beyond that. I think he doesn't deign to worry about who's supposed to be who or what's supposed to be what. I think he's probably just lonely up there above the clouds.

Still, "Miss You" afforded us the hilarious spectacle of Sting struggling with a bass solo (The Revolution bailed him out) and Wood struggling to play in time or tune (ditto), and then there was "Mountains", the churning chant pivoted on brisk welts of brass before another moving exit and another encore, the adoring house hushed by the opening strains of "Sometimes It Snows In April", an elegy so melodramatic it would be ludicrous but for the utter conviction of the angelic voice swooning under the burden of its imagined grief.

This is the uniqueness of Prince – he feels no shame. He brings an uncluttered naivety, an obscene enthusiasm to the most overwrought emotion and feels no embarrassment in laying it bare by laying it on thick. The cliches peel back to the core of their impact under his caress like layers off an onion, the spell of his sob choking me at the beauty of witnessing someone doing something better than anyone else ever has.

After that it was inconceivable that He could give and I could take any more, I was so blissed out by the sorrow, so exhausted by the brilliance, but "Purple Rain" pumped me erect for one last gasping climax, Prince pinioned to the front of the stage, wailing and orchestrating that mighty anthem to regret, a recluse luxuriating in the limelight one last time, exhibiting his contradictions to the end.

There He was, tearing out the shattering guitar solo with the abandoned exuberance of Hendrix and the clinical control of McLaughlin. There He was, singing soul from his soul because he doesn't know any other way and, without debasing it, being quite cheekily vaudeville too, referring to himself as "your little friend", sending himself up and taking us higher.

Two hours in the company of this ultimate showman, this complete performer, this song-and-dance man, and all the desperate faith I'd maintained in fickle pop made perfect sense.

I had a star in my eyes and a memory, forever, of heaven in my head.

Steve Sutherland

— NME AUGUST 23 —

UP UNTIL NOW for this listener, the artistic peaks of the great performers of American black music have existed only in the collective memory, on faded film reels or cold vinyl.

That doesn't prevent enjoyment of the reckless jive and bop of Louis Jordan's R'n'B, the Baptist holler Little Richard turned into rollicking sexual liberation, James Brown's heart-rending, cape-clad soul marathon-man sessions or Sly Stone's euphoric celebrations that chilled into despair and recrimination. But hindsight tells only half the story – music crystallises its true relevance when captured head on, when you encounter a performer who, in the shock and thrill of the present, creates and takes control of the many freedoms etched in his sound and vision.

Such was the case with the opening performance of Prince's three-night Wembley stint, before a charged, anticipative audience. A kaleidoscopic glide through the sleazy and feted stereotypes of American culture, a dazzling tour de force of rhythmic and melodic inspiration and invention, the show staked and won him a place in the select pantheon of past pioneers. Not just because Prince subsumes so much of the past and makes it his own, not just because he has balanced (and blurred) sexual roles and musical cross-pollination, betwixt feminine and masculine, black and white, pop and progressive, but because he's now assembled the many identities and self-made celebrity of his own career into a uniform whole.

Prince's versatility and his sensitivity to his music's heritage has been used to fuel his lust for an ongoing orgy of stardom. So many fantasies, so little time: escalating from androgynous disco beginning to the rudeboy high-school pop of *Dirty Mind*, from *Controversy*'s media come-on lead to the atom age starlet of *1999* and to the final crowning glory of *Purple Rain*. That tour and album may have seemed like an end, a rapturous confirmation, a merging of fantasy with actuality. But the psychedelic hues and jazzy inflections unfolded in *All Around The World In A Day* and consolidated on the best bits of *Parade* showed he had a whole new bag to swing.

Confirming his pre-eminence as an instigator who keeps one step ahead of his peers has left *Parade*-era Prince relaxed with his own past, imbuing his stardom with a new breadth and generosity. The persona is not just that of a rarefied being – he now becomes a spiv, demented diva, cocky pimp, lounge-bar swing sultan, a dance wizard combining The Godfather's grace with electro-era calisthenics.

He may pledge allegiance to the Almighty, but Prince's whole show revolves around the pleasures of the flesh. A master of crowd control... the build-up, delay and the final, shattering climax... this is private fantasy made public property. The history of black music rewritten as the eternal search for the perpetual orgasm, the show starts as it means to go on – teasing and provocative, the group unwind the feet-finding beat and wispy finery of "All Around The World In A Day" from behind a drawn curtain.

And then: "Hey London, I wanna dance..." Stripped to the waist, hair slicked back, Prince's bony torso has the cavorting impishness of a satyr, the bell-bottom strides are hung low but his buttocks barely begin before the midget frame is completed by lithe, elastic limbs. And dance he does, the repertoire of stage moves are the most stunningly choreographed, dynamic and economic I've ever seen. And while there's lots of little stops and starts, freezing the motion with a hawkish glint, a narcissistic hip swivel and swooping full-length split, it's more than mere egotism, being tuned into every switching nuance of the superb 10-piece band.

The guitar-grinding fixation that reportedly ruined his only previous London performance is nowhere in evidence. It's the tight, clipped style of Wendy and Miko Weaver that predominate, Prince's lustrous flow is evident only on the closing "Purple Rain". The democracy has evidently paid off. Reworking even recent material, The Revolution switch from sonic otherworldly funk to horn-boosted big band jazz, one minute delicately embossed with the allure of eastern promise, then bearing down on some monster-stomping, Sly-scorched crescendoes. Their scope, lust and flexibility perfectly complements the vaulting ambition of their swaggering, scaffold-scaling leader.

Costume changes and semi-striptease acts abound: Prince's image fixation goes beyond musical greats – he wants to be Gypsy Rose Lee as much as he wants to be James Brown, wants to be Rudolph Valentino as much as he patently is Little Richard's nuclear age offspring. After the opening foray, he reappears in a lemon zoot suit, trading off hipster routines with the spry backing-singer trio; the recurring horn motif is JB's "Popcorn", the chant, "*The roof, the roof is on fire. We don't care, let the motherfucker burn down.*" The frantic thrust gives way to the lush libidinous ballad "Do Me Baby", mounting to a sax-coaxed climax that plays off his falsetto screech against gruff intimations. "When Doves Cry", with its electro crank and tear-stained piano trickles, reconciles emotional family ties with prosaic sexuality, an abiding scourge of many a soulman but which Prince seems unbothered by.

"Another Lover" is a highpoint for the band. A song written with sophisticated instrumental setting in mind, it allows the boomerang bass, hovering horns and synthesized trickery to duel and establish full indomitable range.

Reborn as a charming suitor in white tie, polka-dot waistcoat and a fetching pair of stilettoes, the chameleon is soon shedding his skin. The coquettish catcalls of "I Wanna Be Your Lover" become the prostrate mic-straddling of "Head". Midway through slurping 'n' moaning into the mic, still slithering and humping across the floor, he stops: "If you're taking any of this seriously, you're a bigger fool than I am." A nice humorous touch, as was the stagehand wiping the floor clean after him.

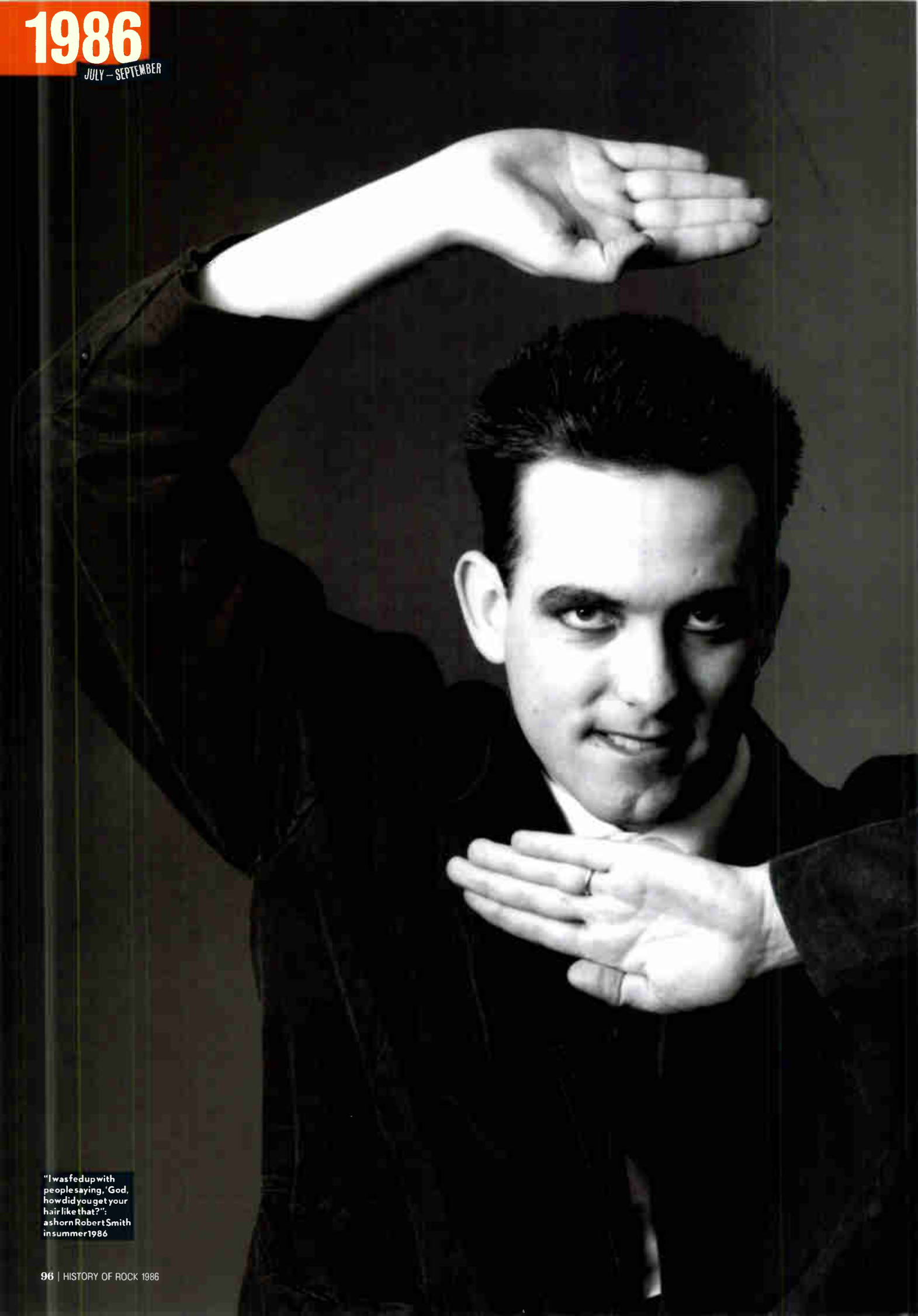
> Prince's bony torso has the cavorting impishness of a satyr

Like everyone else, I've had my doubts about Prince – his cosmic bullshit, the apolitical moral vacuum, a Nero fiddling while his beloved Rome (read "America") burns. And sure he's unlikely to unleash the tension and angst that his forbear Sly Stone did in *There's A Riot Goin' On*. But once you've seen the show, none of that matters. Prince contrives a lavish celebration and tribute to black culture, to those who dared break and cross barriers, to explicit beauty and sensuality and to his own career, which has used all those traits. Like any great showman, he pursues his obsessions with such single-minded dedication and attention to detail that, for the duration, the excitement and intrigue of his world becomes a part of the audience's.

My only quibbles – the 90-minute show was at least an hour shorter than pre-publicity had led us to believe. Perhaps the showstopping finales, a perfect foil for his blinding stage flash, were overworked (a live recording would benefit from the insertion of such Princely classics as "Dirty Mind", "When You Were Mine", "Little Red Corvette"...). Apart from that – brilliant. I've never seen anything quite like it. *Gavin Martin* •

THE FLESH AND THE SOUL

"Prince contrives a lavish celebration and tribute to black culture, to those who dared break and cross barriers, to explicit beauty and



"I was fed up with people saying, 'God, how did you get your hair like that?'": ashorn Robert Smith in summer 1986

"Your little fantasy universe"

On the road in the US and France with THE CURE. Revealed: a band whose mystique is in fact built on a foundation of curry, football, soap operas and tormenting Lol Tolhurst, who was "raised by anteaters" and is now owned by Robert Smith.

— MELODY MAKER AUGUST 30 —

"THIS ONE'S ABSOLUTE psychedelic madness, OK, so really go for it! I want the camera zipping in on the faces, in close, then down to guitar, then back to faces, really zipping..."

Scene: Orange, Provence. An empty 8,000-seater Ancient Roman amphitheatre. The Cure are about to run through "Primary", miming to a tape of their capacity show, recorded the night before. Tim Pope is loping around the lobe of the stage like the fitful offspring of Olive Oyl and Vincent Price, craning his considerable neck to peer through a lens, clapping his hands to keep up rhythm and pace, adrenalising everyone. Pope is after something only he can see. Pope is making a movie.

The relationship between band and boy-wonder video rogue goes back three years to "Let's Go To Bed", the first desperate, daft occasion in which Smith's surreal humour was unleashed as visual relief from the vinyl task. Since then, Pope and The Cure have been virtually inseparable. It's impossible to think of "The Walk" or "Love Cats" or "Close To Me" without feeling that the synchronised anarchy of Pope's bravely scatter-brained technique hasn't, in some flighty sense, helped liberate Smith from the austere image that was choking the creative life out of him.

Pope, for his part, will maintain the madness was there all along. He refuses to work with anyone who doesn't wriggle with character. His video portraits have included Neil Young, Marc Almond and the Banshees as well as The Cure, all acts schizophrenically strong on personality and erratically prone to experimentation. People like himself.

Pope's aim is always sympathetic – to enhance the song he's working with, to play with its inherent innuendos, to divert without damaging the kernel, the core. Hence "Close To Me" was shot in a wardrobe. You can't get much closer than claustrophobia. »

ROSS MARINHO

Now he's embarking on his first feature film and no one seems sure what it's supposed to be, let alone how it'll turn out. Smith, who's financing it himself through Fiction on the cavalier understanding that it'll be so good they'll have no trouble selling it, visualises some vague double result – a concert video comprising the footage shot against the mighty impressive pillared backdrop, and a full feature film using concert footage, previous anecdotal clips and some scenes to be shot at a later date, lending the project characters and plot, like a Cure update of *A Hard Day's Night*.

And *Pink Floyd At Pompeii*?

"Yeah, everyone's said that. Did you notice we played 'Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun' at soundcheck?"

Yeah. They played it. Perfectly.

The risks, of course, are many. Because of the limited budget, all the live filming had to be done on Saturday, at the concert, with close-ups following during Sunday's mock-up. Rain on one or both days would have scuppered the whole thing – £150,000 literally down the drain because they couldn't comprehend their cheapest insurance quote: £50,000! It didn't rain until Monday.

Then there's the venue itself. The amphitheatre is one of the oldest in France, and not surprisingly, it's subject to paranoically strict government protection. They generally allow occasional classical concerts here, high-brow stuff, nothing too popular, £50-a-ticket jobs that take full advantage of the eerily crystalline acoustics without much troubling the neighbouring town with volume or mess.

The last rock concert permitted here was more than two years ago, when Dire Straits had their sold-out second concert panic-cancelled by the local council. The Cure's gig is very much a yardstick, set up by Paris promoters to prove that pop is a responsible way of making money these days, matured beyond all the attendant hullaballoo of revolution and vandalism. Meetings take place almost hourly between the promoters and one local official or another, but the only real hiccough occurs when the security guards' over-zealous dobermanns chase an interloper off the rock overlooking the theatre and he falls and sprains his ankle. The intruder turns out to be the local police chief on a plain-clothes reconnoitre and, as a result, a curfew is imposed on Sunday's filming. Shooting actually ceases at 3am.

"Has anyone got a clean sock? A brightly coloured sock? Fluorescent?"

Then there's perhaps the biggest risk of all, working with Pope in a medium in which he's untried and untested. After all, the worst films of recent months have been over-extended videos- like *Absolute Beginners*, all false with no foundation. Smith sees it this way: "We wanted to film it as opposed to working with video, because every concert we do now reaches a point that has seemed unattainable in the past and I wanted it captured forever, before we move on or give up.

"I don't think it's a risk working with Pap [his nickname for Pope], because he isn't really a director. We could have got in some proper director to make a film of any old concert, but he wouldn't know what the band was about and I want this to be a Cure film about The Cure."

Pope himself would make a fascinating movie. Scuttling across the stage crabwise during Saturday's show, he resembled some Igor figure, hunch-backed under the camera, fighting with the equipment as much as focusing it, determined to achieve the same dizzy effects he conjured on the videos. On Sunday, he even has the camera back on the trapeze for "In Between Days", launching it in, catching it inches from Smith's lipstick leer. Ask him why film and he'll say: "Because film's beautiful."

Ask Smith if he fancies himself as another De Niro: "Strangely enough, I've been offered a film opposite Nastassja Kinski in the last two days. I turned it down." Why? "She's not my type of woman. Ha! Ha!"

> "I've been offered a film opposite Nastassja Kinski"

"**THE CROWD LAUGHED** and cheered him on as he stabbed himself repeatedly in the chest."

Scene: San Francisco. Yes, it did happen, but not, of course, quite as the papers said. The Cure were about to take the stage when there was some commotion near the mixing desk and a deranged white male of indeterminate age plunged a knife into himself. Police eventually stunned him with a tranquilising dart and carted him off in the meat wagon. It's not that bad in France – but almost.

The Cure are the biggest here, number one. When their coach arrives at the amphitheatre, the streets are literally lined with Smith lookalikes circa "In Between Days" and they scream and grab just like Duranies, each with his or her particular idol. The filming is nearly critically affected when, during "Piggy In The Mirror" ("very appropriate", according to Smith) a determined young mademoiselle takes the security by surprise and rushes onstage, bowling past the frontline and making a beeline for Boris who, oblivious behind the drum riser, just drums on.

She's apprehended before much damage is done but only rushes will reveal whether she's immortalised forever on film, a gate-crasher at The Cure party.

After the show, the photographer and I are hanging round like good professionals, supping ice-cold Heinekens, waiting for the band to towel down and all that, when we're approached by a winsome, flushed blonde who's been allowed past the bouncers because she feels faint. She accepts the photographer's chair and makes it understood, in passable pidgin English, that she needs water. We oblige, though she still looks a bit dicky when suddenly Simon appears and she's up and at him, pestering, stroking his shoulders, babbling her love.

The tour manager heaves her out and it transpires she's been turning up all over, conning her way into Simon's presence. Later, we travel to the band's chateau, about 15 miles away in the middle of nowhere, and the phone rings in Simon's room. It's the girl's mother. She's got his number somehow and she's concerned because her daughter's gone missing, with the family's jewels! Simon returns the receiver pronto and heads for the bar where, sure enough, the girl appears. She's escorted out but she's still around the next day, lurking at the gates, watching, awaiting her chance.

"**I THINK THEY'RE HIGH** on something or other" (English tourist to his daughter, Sunday afternoon, Orange).

Flashback.

Scene: The lobby of a first-class hotel in Boston, Mass. Two hours previously, The Cure completed the first show of their American tour, and – by means of celebration, or maybe that was just a handy excuse – Lol drank a bottle of Armagnac brandy all by himself.

He's now passed out on a baggage trolley being wheeled around the foyer by the rest of the band. Porl is filming his nodding head, his glistening face, his private parts, anything that takes his fancy. The desk clerk doesn't bat an eyelid.

Lol is taken to his room, deposited on his bed and his door is left slightly open for regular inspections should he decide to do a Hendrix, or should that be a Mama Cass?

An hour later, a posse decides to check on his progress and finds him snuggled down in the corridor outside his room. A brief investigation reveals that Lol had risen in his stupor, pissed in a cupboard, and then curled up on the landing – everything right in all wrong places. Very understandable.

He's placed back on his bed, snoring blissfully, and further checks are made on the hour, every hour until it's too much trouble – the rest of the crew approaching Lol's condition themselves.

Come their morning – a late lunchtime call – Lol's found to have risen in the night and, quite sensibly, being a security-conscious sort of chap, he's fastened all the chains on the inside of his door. The rest try to rouse him – his phone's off the hook and repeated banging on the door renders no response. Eventually, in exasperation, a hotel porter is summoned to hacksaw the door open. "Da las' time I did this, da guy was dead," he grins.

Lol's inside though, sage and sound, still out for the count. Three minutes of ferocious shaking and he's back among them. He'd been on the phone to his girlfriend (he finds out later). She was in LA, he couldn't speak, but she'd listened anyway as he fell asleep cradling the receiver. His phone bill on checking out was 1,500 dollars. Another Cure legend. Another day on the road.

Chris Parry, Fiction boss and Cure Captain Pugwash, has this theory that The Cure have only ever existed to kill Lol. Sometimes this seems plausible. Sometimes this even seems to be working. Certainly, he's the butt of a relentless barrage of buddy abuse, the reluctant jester in the court of king Cure, accustomed to his niche even if, in the deepest of hangovers, the banter still niggles.

May 22, 1986: Smith and Lol Tolhurst on the Orient Express, where they are interviewed by Mark Ellen for *Whistle Test* and run up a £2,000 bar bill

I've never seen Lol actually blow under the stress and scandal, but Smith smiles and reckons he sometimes comes close: "I've never told you about Lol, have I? I've never told you the story of how we found him? Simon and I went on one of those school trips, y'know, educational holidays, to Africa, and one day we discovered Lol in the bush. He'd been brought up by anteaters and half his face had been eaten off by ants.

"Well, Simon and I, we felt sorry for him, so we brought him back with us and paid for plastic surgery, fed him soup under piles of earth and all that, and how does he repay us? He sneaked ferrets under his skin, that's what he did, sneaked ferrets under the plastic surgery."

All this is revealed as an explanation for the magnificent gamut of contortions Lol had run his face through the previous evening before retiring rather tired and pretty emotional. We're in the bus now, Smith and Simon close to tears with laughter, Porl offering to illustrate the story with drawings (he went to art school, you know). Lol's up the front.

"You don't believe us? OK. Who owns you, Loz?" Simon shouts.

"You do. And Robert," Lol answers, good-natured, world-weary.

"And how's that, Loz?"

"Because you found me in the bush being brought up by anteaters," he states, deadpan. "In your little fantasy universe, that is."

Smith has been quoted as saying that, should Lol ever leave, The Cure would be over. I think I know what he means. However else would the backstage open-air band hospitality area boast an honest-to-goodness cigarette tree? A real Burl Ives "Big Rock Candy Mountain" job? The explanation is perfectly simple.

It seems Lol smokes too much – chain-smokes, according to Smith – so while he's setting his keyboards for the Orange gig, Smith and Simon hollow out a packet of Marlboro, stick all the cigarettes on a tree with masking tape like baubles on branches at Christmas, and carefully reseal the box with a message inside.

Sure enough, hours later, Lol snaps the Cellophane on the packet. He shakes his head, pities their puerility and picks a fag off the tree.

"**OH MY GOD,** they've got a new singer!"

Scene: New York, Radio City.

Ah yes, that haircut. Fans threatening suicide. From a cluster of Triffids to a burnt field of stubble in one wanton sitting. Barb(er)aric. Why, oh why?

"I was fed up with people saying, 'God, how did you get your hair like that?' so, before I went to America, I thought, 'I'll get you,' and I had it cut off. The paradox, of course, is that now people talk about the hair even more. It's all they talk about.

"Everyone hates it. I hate it most. It's the most unattractive haircut. I just about recognise myself in the mirror now, now it's grown a little. Still, it makes no difference to me and, if it does to other people, well, I hope they die. Actually, though, it's horrified Pap. The hair was the whole base of his film."

Hence the wig?

"Uh... the wig... I don't know how... or why..."

I should explain. When he's not sporting a particularly natty Donovan cap ("Someone threw it, it hit me, it fits"), Smith's wearing a Spinal Tap syrup which, when teased and caressed and kicked around the garden, uncannily approximates his pre-snip follicular edifice.

It was Pope's idea, presumably, that Smith should wear it on the walk out to the stage, only for Simon to snatch it off before the cameras at the very last moment? "Something like that, yeah."

"**DESMOND LYNAM IS** God."

Scene: Orange, backstage. Reminiscing. The World Cup. Smith's gloomy predictions of English pedantry in the *Maker* were, sadly, all too accurate, but he still wears that England shirt with pride. Indeed, when the band were due to do some French TV on the day of the Paraguay game, Smith refused to cross the Channel unless he was guaranteed access to live coverage of the match.

The French commandeered a cinema and set up a link, Smith and Simon, fully kitted out and bottled up, dancing in the aisles after Lineker's glorious third. There's been a marked metamorphosis in The Cure during the past two years, something sane and necessary has happened, something to do with Simon rejoining. Smith has cannily (or casually) made a lot of meals out of virtually nothing by virtue of his bizarre beginnings. If his early career pursued a spiral into darkness and despair, an introverted, weird world of enigma, how much weirder that the band should now emerge football fanatics.

They can carry on the way they like now, become anyone they want, because anything they do breaches the code of preconception which, once cemented, takes years to crack. Their embracing of *EastEnders* and the everyday seems subversive, a snub to those who insist on Smith retaining the role of psychic guru, but then again, it's not in his nature to do things by halves and his normality has acquired the frenetic status of satire, of bloated caricature, of – as they put it – Mr Blakeys.

Smith, for example, has just edited a scratch video of *The Price Is Right* for Simon in which Leslie Crowther's every gesture is repeatedly scrutinised. "Sheer heaven," says Simon. "Sheer hell," says Lol.

When Smith decides to go swimming in the Med at midnight, he can't just take a dip like everyone else, he has to swim miles out of sight.

"Yeah, I was trying to be Mark Spitz," he says.

"I've never been so worried in my life," says Mary, his girlfriend.

In any event, he swallowed a gutful of briny and has suffered gyp with his guts ever since. Which, incidentally, doesn't deter him for one moment from the band's main preoccupation these days – curry.

Pining in foreign climes for their prawn madras and pilau, the band have done their utmost to rustle up some Indian nosh. Booking in at the Sunset Marquee in LA, they were convinced it was a self-catering hotel and spent a fortune on the ingredients for a right Bombay slap-up. But when Smith and Simon entered their room, there were no pots and pans, no utensils in sight.

Simon was despatched to the kitchens, and in his absence, Smith discovered... no stove! Simon went "all boo-hoo" and cried his eyes out, so they ate the ingredients cold and raw, washed down with ample amber nectar. This, it seems, accounts for the pinup pasted to the seat facing Simon on the tour bus – a picture of a nice biryani cut from a magazine. At moments of utter stress, the bassist has been known to beat his head against it and cry, "Why, why, why?"

Determined not to face defeat again, the band decided to have frozen rubies sent over to the studio near Toulouse where they now go to record the next album. But what about the record?

"Well, we've demoed about 15 songs and it all sounds great. We've been playing one, 'I Want To Be You', on the rest of the tour and, as we're recording out of the country, away from the distractions, it'll just be us and the Mrs Blakeys, so it'll probably turn out to be a very odd album, for a change! It's perfect, in fact, because we should just finish recording to coincide with the beginning of the European championships."

Strangely strange but oddly normal. *Steve Sutherland* •

RICHARD YOUNG / REX FEATURES

"People are quite surprised when they find out I'm a halfway decent sort of bloke": Fall frontman Mark E Smith

PHIL NI

"I do always try to be nice"

A revealing audience with THE FALL's Mark E Smith. From teenage hauntings to The Clash, the royal family and Live Aid, the singer casts his conversational net widely and with great humanity. "There's nothing worse than a thick posh person," he concludes, sagely.

— NME AUGUST 30 —

MARK E SMITH, weaned on Lenny Bruce's speed-fuelled monologues, the self-confessed big shot original rapper, picks a subject and he's off. Drugs seem a good place to start.

"I don't think heroin is any good, it's crap, a horrible drug. But I've got to say it – if someone wants to smoke themselves to death or drink themselves to death with whisky, jump out of windows or whatever, then it's their basic right. I always thought that was what Britain was all about. It sounds like a nutty anarchist idea, but a lot of it is down to education and a lot of it I don't really care about. Anyone who gets into heroin must be pretty weird anyway.

"Have you ever seen anyone on it? They sweat and snuffle like little piglets. Imagine paying money to be like that – you'll find out what it's like when you're 90 anyway."

While the national draconian drug backlash finds favour with pop culture's stuffed shirts, The Fall release "Mr Pharmacist" – a cover of Texan garage punks The Other Half's '60s speed anthem – as their new single. A sort of American "Here Comes the Nice". It's blessed with a careering, euphoric rush and all the subtlety of a scorched sinus.

"I've always really liked bands like that – the sort that just make one good single and then disappear. It's better than all this tedious three-hour hippy shit like Grateful Dead that seems to be coming back into vogue."

But hardly likely to get much airplay.

"If you worried about things like that you'd probably never release a single. I mean, if The Kinks released 'You Really Got Me' tomorrow, I doubt it would get played. Unless they remixed it, of course. Actually it's an anti-drug song," smirks Smith.

Nothing of the sort, of course. It's The Fall on a fun run awayday, still sticking in the craw, underlining pomposity and hypocrisy in Britpop; pricking the prevailing mood of compassion and concern.

"It was obvious with Boy George. Every interview he did, he'd make a point of denying drug use. Now it's going to be My Struggle Against Evil, some dickhead spoiling it for everybody else. I don't mean him any harm, but he's had all the good stuff, hasn't he? They always get it.

"But I don't understand how he can be held responsible for influencing his fans. I like Elvis Presley's records, some of them anyway, but it doesn't mean I'm going to eat five hamburgers a day.

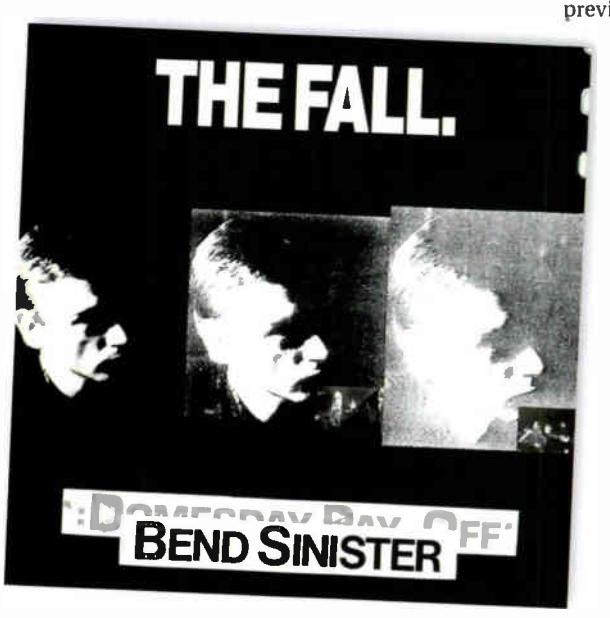
"The British love it, a man down on his luck trying to get back up. But it enrages me – his whole career has been based on slagging everybody else who took drugs.

"It's just like Pete Townshend. I spit at the TV when he's on. How dare he tell teenagers, 'I've had all the good things in life – wine, champagne, beer, any drug you like – but they're all bad for you'? In other words, what he's saying is, 'I've used them to the point where they don't work any more and the only way I can get my fun now is by moralising about it.' I find it revolting."

> "Being on stage shouldn't be a pleasure, it should be like your craft"

FROM THE TRAIN window, rural Holland is a tangle of idyllic life-size toytowns, windmills, waterways, playhouses and genial folk on bicycles. In a meadow deep in the heart of the flatlands, decked out for the day with the trappings of a village fête, The Fall are playing the annual Sneekwave Festival. The glorious sunshine and laid-back ambience is an incongruous setting for The Fall's brand of pummelling intensity, ruthlessly addictive razor riffs and Smith's demonic incantations.

"It's a bit sleepy here, always is," Smith says later. "They're spoilt in a way. It's not their fault, they just see too many groups."



An enjoyable Fall performance, packed with a brace of now familiar songs from the forthcoming album presently titled *Bend Sinister*, but it still lacks that confrontational tension that makes the group really special.

"Halfway through I could feel the band going along with the groove and the audience. That's fatal; I always try to steer clear of that area where you start seeing what little tricks can be dug up to take the audience higher. You get to the stage where the group is enjoying it more than the audience.

"Being on stage shouldn't be a pleasure, it should be like your craft. I don't consider it performing at all, performers are like other people to me. It's the same with writing, too. There should always be a fear involved of what you're doing, a fear that maybe you shouldn't be there at all."

He doesn't do much on stage. There's no projection, no smiles or emotion etched across those sunken cheek and jowls, barely a flicker from his graveyard eyes. At times it seems he's summoned up a sound from his cohorts that is taking a terrible toll on his soul; other times the lyrics find flight in the whirlwind and he looks dead natural, relaxed almost – it's the struggle that makes him the focus, makes him so fascinating to watch.

Smith dreamed this band up 10 years ago, and now he's their only surviving member. The great, loyal Karl Burns left early this year amid rumours of debilitating personal problems and a growing, violent antagonism between him and Smith. Other members may come and go, but it's Mark who has the final say. His vision of cultural revolution, wresting rock from the hands of southern English media stylists and transplanting it in a northern wasteland where spirit and class conflict became constants, may have developed dramatically in recent recordings, but his own reputation as an uppity, contrary bastard has remained.

Whatever he may say, there's a part of Smith that still relishes this reputation. He stalks the backstage area, a long, stringy figure in black leather coat, permanently slouched, beer bottle in hand. The heads turn as he passes.

"People are quite surprised when they find out I'm a halfway decent sort of bloke, and I do always try to be nice to anyone I come across, but sometimes you end up being taken advantage of. That's why I wrote that new song, 'MES In Shoulder Pads' – when someone comes down on me, I'll react by coming down twice as hard."

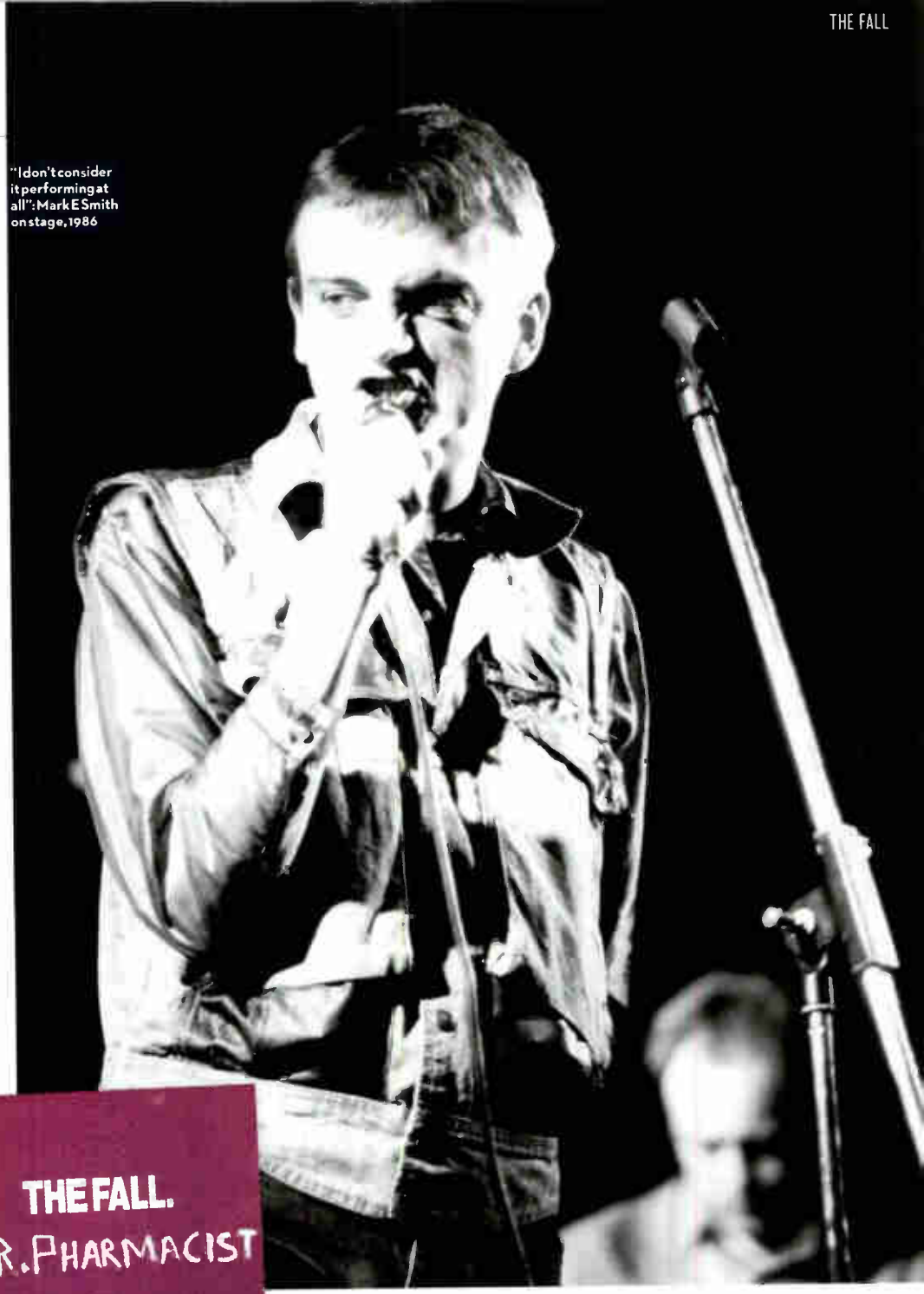
Nonetheless, a garrulous easy-going urban dweller with a wife and mortgage, Smith has mellowed. At Sneekwave he meets and befriends Three Johns' Jon Langford, for a long time the recipient of his wrathful bombast.

A major reason for his new, conciliatory attitude is 23-year-old wife of three years and Fall guitarist Brix Elise Smith. Not since the departure of Kay Carroll, former manager and girlfriend, has anyone been allowed so much input into The Fall. The product of a well-to-do American family, Brix was still at school when her parents separated and she subsequently moved from Los Angeles to Chicago. Many consider she's only in the group because she's married to his nibs and provides a public profile previously denied The Fall.

But apart from her own independent outfit The Adult Net and a recent offer to supply a soundtrack for *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, Brix has also written the music for "Riddler" and "US 80's – 90's", two standouts on the new album. Back in Los Angeles, one of her closest friends was Sue Hoffs, now lead singer with The Bangles, and Brix has a peculiarly American drive to make The Fall similarly recognised. On the way back to the hotel, crammed into a white Transit van while an electric storm raged all around, I asked Mark how many copies the group's last LP sold.

"Forty thousand? A hundred thousand? Who knows! I never bother asking, to tell you the truth."

Back at the hotel, Brix corners me in the lobby.



"I don't consider it performing at all": Mark E Smith on stage, 1986

"I don't want to sell 40,000 records, I want to sell a million. Mark isn't really bothered about this, but I want to get to all those people who aren't hearing the records. It doesn't really mean anything unless you get a gold disc."

I say it's good she's there, pushing for it.

"Yes, but what can I do about it?"

What indeed? For all their resilience and continuing excellence, The Fall seemed to have reached a level of acceptance it's difficult to imagine them rising above. One of my favourite lines in a Fall song is "*There is no culture is my brag*". Typically dual-edged, it could mean that the prevailing pop culture is so impoverished as to be irrelevant or that the notion of culture as a series of systematic marketing strategies is wholly fatuous. Smith's career has been dedicated to his own notion of culture, of cool – a legacy of enduring indolence and withering depictions of British life and class matched only by Madness. But it's unlikely his insular language and the abrasive world he's created will ever court the favour of the mainstream.

The Fall cover their tracks quickly; as times have got more complex, the literal-mindedness and dogma of their peers has been rejected. The feisty rumble and angular approach of old has grown into a clenched mire of sound, trapping you deeper than ever in Smith's universe; a fine policy for Britain's most consistently imaginative and inventive rock band, now exploring the virtues of implosion as well as explosion, intimacy as well as animation.

Some complain that there's no direct meaning in Fall songs, but they miss the point. In this world, moods are conjured up then split asunder; the words, often just noises to get the line across, don't represent one sacrosanct viewpoint but a variety of characters and opinions. The beer-addled ogre of "The Classical", the apathetic suburbanite of "Living Too Late" or the shaman behind "What You Need"...

Continuing the towering success of *The Wonderful And Frightening World* and *This Nation's Saving Grace*, *Bend Sinister* casts The Fall sound even further to provide remedies for jaded ears – "The Riddler" is a brooding folk chant delivered from the depths of delirium, "MES In Shoulder Pads" is organ-pepped, jokily self-deprecating Europop and "US 80's–90's" is my personal favourite – a futuristic rap trap with a vision of past, present and future repression in The Land Of The Free applied and accepted by "*codes of silence*".

Praise should also go to The Fall members who amassed the voluminous soundscapes, "the well-produced bedroom sound", as Smith calls it. Young drummer Simon Wolstencroft, bassist Stephen Hanley, guitar FX man Craig Scanlon and Simon Rogers, whose battery of synth/computer and classical training also earns him money scoring soundtracks at the BBC and, hopefully, soon in feature films. It's said Mark treats them dictatorially.

"Only a bit, it's not like some Kevin Rowland-type loony. They can do what they like; I only get on their backs when they start shouting at roadies or behaving like bloody rock stars. They do it for pure love, really; it's quite touching in a way. I think they get a lot more out of it than me; when I come off stage it's a big weight off my shoulders."

Yet he's still the one who gets all the acclaim.

"I think they should get more notice, but that's not really up to me. You get people who try to interview the rest of the band and they deliberately say nowt because they know they're being patronised."

IN THE MOST penetrating analysis of the Smith muse I've yet read, Mark Sinker (writing in *The Wire*) revealed how ingestion of hallucinogens and the sighting of ghosts in adolescence were decisive factors in shaping Smith's grotesque Fall country. A frightening time?

"No, I was interested to think and read about ghosts, so I wasn't scared. Mind you, if I saw one now I'd freak out. The same with acid: I liked to go places, do things with it, but now I couldn't handle it. It was a funny time in my life, but it was good to have, a shame to lose it in a way. But even now I can feel an atmosphere when I go into a place. Like in Berlin, man, you know something horrible happened there, there's so many bad stories just hanging in the air.

"But I think the occult is a morbid fascination. That's what got me out of it all. In Manchester I used to know a lot of psychics, Kay [Carroll, former manager and girlfriend] was psychic. It's a funny thing – a lot of psychics never have any money and they always have bad luck. They're like vessels on the world, it travels through them but doesn't stick with them."

Religion is usually embraced by those who can't come to terms with such experiences, but the new song "Terry Waite Sez" – where the »

GARY LORNE

continent-hopping emissary is said to be doing his good deeds because he can't cope "*with the pressure of his own life*" – suggests Smith was not one of those.

"No way, my dad hated it if vicars came to the door. He'd slam it in their face before they could say a word. My grandad is even worse, he's obsessively anti-church, wants to burn them all to the ground. S'funny with old fellas, either they must have been really screwed up by it or they know more about it then we do. I guess they must have had it hard in them days, must have had to do what the church said in a lot of things."

Aren't you impressed by the clergy speaking out on social issues, then?

"You must be joking. The English church is the most ridiculous thing in the world, it's hilarious. I think being a vicar must be such a good job, a real easy job to have. What I can't understand is why the C Of E had the Pope in their church when he came over. Why did they bother splitting up in the first place? What I don't like about it all is that they seem to be trying to get people back into church. I mistrust it all – people think they have got to say something. It's a big disease of our time, pressure groups. They cause a lot of trouble."

So they should just sit back and let the powers that be get on with it?

"No, I'm not talking about things like South Africa. People think because some loony writes into the paper that's what a lot of people think, when in fact 99 out of 100 people never form groups. People are told to have opinions on things they'd never have thought about in a million years, be it anti-smoking or anti-cheese. Some people have nothing better to do than interfere with the freedoms in other people's lives. I think it's dead evil; it's not a matter of left or right, it's just dead wrong."

Mr and Mrs Smith spent Christmas with Brix's parents in America. When they're not watching endless re-runs of *The Twilight Zone*, it affords Mark a chance to examine the upper echelons of US high society. When he first visited the States five years ago, he reckoned it was a much more open society than Britain, a notion he's since discarded.

"I always say to US immigration when they won't give us our visas, 'Do you think we'd want to live in this dump?' I sincerely mean that – even if I was a millionaire, I wouldn't live there. If you've no money there, you're a shit; at least in Britain they pretend to your face you're OK. I find the callousness horrible."

But surely it's getting the same in Britain?

"Yeah, it's the same sort of soullessness. Part of that is British people believing what they're told, like the Dutch give you shit for being violent and aggressive. Today I was just waiting for someone to mention South Africa, and I would have said, 'It's your fucking problem, mate. The ruling party are all Dutch.'"

But the English descendants are hardly any different.

"They were in Rhodesia, they gave it back to them. S'alright there now, it works well. You'd never get that in South Africa, because it's the Dutch, the Boers."

The original Orangemen?

"That's right. It makes me laugh. If Britain did the right thing – sent an army in to depose the government – all these bastards would go, 'Fucking aggressive warmongers.'

"That's what's great about Britain, people are really guilty about South Africa – which is really healthy. At least people are thinking about it, whereas here people don't even think about it. But I don't know about sanctions. Sanctions is the business mind's magic word and I don't think they'd give a shit about it. They're so fuckin' bluff, they're goading Britain onto sanctions, so I doubt they'd make any difference.

"What you want is a task force there; that's what the UN should be for. It's like Hitler – they should've stopped him but they didn't. The UN is a con anyway; we're paying money so that they can put British working-class people out of work."

Just like the Common Market?

"Yeah, what a con that was. I voted yes on that. Do you remember? They put it across that only an extreme nutcase would even consider voting no. So even I was persuaded."

November 8, 1985: Smith with The Fall, including his wife Brix (right), on Channel 4 pop show *The Tube*

REX FEATURES

In last year's Christmas issue of *NME*, Smith exposed his flair as a subculture critic (an underlying theme in many Fall songs) in a prose piece. He admits to having found it "bloody hard" to write.

"I used to write a lot of prose on and off. When we were doing *Hex*, I was doing stories all the time and the songs were like the bits left over. I thought, 'This is crazy, you're taking yourself too seriously, like Norman Mailer but writing for no actual gain.

"I always worry about Nick [Cave] – he thinks I'm being sarcastic. I say, 'You should write a book, but don't put all that stuff in it because it's rubbish.'

"Writing a book must be dead hard – you don't get any feedback for two years and when you do it might be bad. You never have any judgement on it, most of the people who bring out books are bloody charlatans anyway, it's disgraceful.

"My approach to writing has definitely changed. I used to get into the serious thing of loads of words, couldn't get enough into a song. You end up dead pretentious.

"That's what I like about 'Riddler' – it's dead slow and there's not a lot said in it, but it sort of stops people in their tracks. I always remember we used to shout 'Riddler' when we were kids in Salford, but I can't remember what for, it's still a sort of mystery."

A folk tale of a different kind supplied the background for another new song, "Dktr Faustus", a duet betwixt he and Brix.

"I don't really like working with other voices, but 'Faustus' is OK because the mix is fucked up – the backing vocals are at the level the lead vocals should be. It works because it sounds like hell straining to break through.

"People go to me, 'Is that *Faustus* by Goethe or *Faustus* by Mann?', but I read it in a fairy tale book. Somebody gave me a copy of this Goethe book and the drawings of Faustus are the spitting image of me. But I couldn't cope with the book, too hard. Not that I'm a simple fellow or anything, but you have to give those things a lot of time."

In his songs Smith is a writer with a rapper's quick-witted spontaneity, a rapper with a writer's breadth and alacrity. Does he see similarities between electro-rap and The Fall?

"I like the way it's totally non-musical. I don't like Run DMC at all, I like the poppy stuff like Whodini and the jokey stuff like The Get Fresh Crew. Objectively, it's like some of The Fall stuff, the way these guys have the arrogance to believe that people will be interested in these long raps about what socks they put on. It's dead humorous and bitter – I like that. But I think it's getting like reggae and rock'n'roll did in their early days, most of the best stuff has come and gone."

Once it gets co-opted into adverts, the danger signs alight.

"Adverts have gone to new heights of disgustingness, I think they're a good deal of what's responsible for ruining youth. I hate it, hate the cultural implications of it. All these smart people are going into it and they treat it like art. You see one for training shoes and there's bleedin' Wagner in the background, more money spent on it than the rest of the TV schedule.

"I'm not against it altogether, but you can see a lot of young people feel really useless and it's because of the adverts. You must remember when we was kids adverts didn't even touch on youth, whereas teenagers today feel totally inadequate. They need £10 a week just to start looking cool. And it's usually rubbish, dead tatty.

"All the really talented guys who in other times would be making films are going in there and being really smug. Frankie typified that for me, false smartness, using the media, all that situationist garbage about getting into the system. All the symbolism and secret jokes.

"It affects everything, it ruins pubs. I mean, I object to this thing that says bitter drinkers are moronic thugs. So you go to a pub now and you get all these working-class lads fitting into some adman's image of what working-class yobs should be like."

So there's no product you'd like to endorse or be sponsored by?

"Oh certainly, not Swatch watches or anything like that; even lager is getting a little hackneyed now. Personally I'd like to do something with cigarettes. That would get up a few noses."

Like everyone else, Smith is sick and tired of the whole 10-years-since-punk palaver.

> "Adverts are a good deal of what's responsible for ruining youth"

"The whole thing's bizarre, at least six of them have been a real struggle for us, like a bad accident you just want to forget, pure fucking sorrow really. People ask me how we recorded such and such and I can't even remember writing the fucker."

But despite a parallel development to all the others from the class of '76 and a reluctance to relive past glories, the tag of Prole Art Threat still follows him around.

"I hate that image of me hating everything that's middle class. I can go on about it all day, mind you, but it's horrible when people are frightened of you because of it. Really they're just other people with their own set of problems. I remember reading an interview with a group who said everybody who went to Eton should be shot. 'Fuckin' hell,' I thought, 'I don't envy anybody who had to go to Eton, that's punishment enough, surely.'

"But it is amazing when you do college gigs and you get some 19-year-old social secretary talking to you like a schoolteacher. Suddenly everything just boils up – I remember getting one little twat and dangling him out the window. I couldn't believe anyone would still dare talk to people after that.

"A lot of that is a class thing, people telling others what's good for them. I hate it when they're thick as well; there's nothing worse than a thick posh person.

"People go on about Europe and how great it is, and they say get rid of the monarchy. But when you have the middle class in charge you've got the germs for a real evil society. People forget that the SS weren't skinhead thugs, they were doctors and lawyers, guys with a grudge. Give me the Queen anyday."

A disgusting waste of money.

"I agree, but it affects your whole outlook. What do you want, to have her on a bicycle eating chips like they do in France, punishing her with half the dole rate?"

Fair enough, a day's work wouldn't harm the royal family.

"I'm not fucking crying for them, but when you're rich you can't work for a living. It's not their fault, they've just been brought up a certain way.

"I always thought what the working classes did in rock was very interesting. I sound like a bleeding Marxist, but I thought it was weird that even bands that were good always pretended to be Yanks and sing about Cadillacs when British life is just as interesting.

"That's one of the good things about the last 10 years in music, even The Clash were good for that; people forget how weird that was when they mentioned London in a song back then. But you have to go on from that or else you end up writing 'Panic'."

Did you consciously set out to write about the working class in rock?

"Well, I didn't know anything else; you don't know what you've never had. Like most people in this country, I was brought up to believe you're in the best off, freest, greatest society in the world. Did you get that in Northern Ireland?"

Well, you're given high expectations.

"I don't think they'd do that now, even here, the way the country's split, total hatred between the north and south. I mean, even 10 years ago Sheffield, Liverpool and Birmingham were like bustling cities.

"But the old people still believe it, that's why Live Aid was so popular. Me grandma's there on £10 a week and she's going, 'Oh, those poor African people.' She's got great sympathy for everyone else. Which is quite beautiful in a way. Poor people in Britain are the most passionate people in the world.

"Like in that programme Granada did showing the different stages of life for schoolkids from the '60s. The working-class kids were so concerned for the well-off ones, worried about the pressure they were under. They didn't envy them at all. Scousers are like that too, your real Scouser that's been there a few generations, real gentle people, like Harry Cross except nice. They go on about justice, like one of our fans who went up to G-Mex to see us. He's going, 'Ten years to celebrate, celebrating all these crappy bands making it, they should be crying. Ten years to produce these horrible groups, it's terrible.' He was really concerned for us and he'd practically walked from Liverpool to see the show. We're going, 'It's alright, mate. It's not that bad.'" *Gavin Martin* •

"A matter of style"

MILES DAVIS isn't content to rest on his past achievements. Acting cameos. A new label. A collaboration with Prince. A chat about his new album covers all these – not to mention the musical transgressions of Sting, which he can't understand. "Maybe if I was white," he says.

— NME SEPTEMBER 20 —

"MY COLOUR – I'm black, brown with a little red orange in my skin. Red looks good on me, also things that shine.
You do the same with music. If you're gonna make it pleasing to yourself and, in turn, somebody else, you play notes to match your sound, your tone."

From the loose gravel rasp of his speaking voice to the haunting purity of the most syndicated horn in jazz, the black silk and gold brocade of his costumes – his passion for all Kinds Of Blue – Miles Davis is preoccupied with the personal politics of hues and harmonics.

Celebrating 40 years of tirelessly making the running, the man Miles continues to pioneer new musics and promote the careers of eager young players. It's a dual role – part tutorial, part vampiric. The bottom line: what Miles wants, he takes.

And, seven hours later than arranged, he takes 30 minutes out of his whistle-stop schedule to press the flesh and chew the fat.

The location: a pale-green anteroom in Montreux's sedate Palace Hotel. Outside, the early evening air is damp and humid. A fine mountain rain begins to fall as the mist rolls in over the still waters of Lake Geneva. It's a setting more appropriate for illicit encounters or treasonous activities than a Miles Davis progress report.

With the heel of his right hand firmly under his chin – four bony fingers pressed over his lips – Miles pushes his head right back. He's emphasising »

DAVID REDFERN / GETTY

"Everybody wants to label everything": Miles Davison stage in 1986

a point. He's discussing Sting and what Miles insists has been the flagrant misuse of four of today's finest musicians in the ex-Policeman's *Blue Turtle* band.

"You can't take a guy like Darryl Jones [Miles' former bassman] and put a muzzle on his drive... muzzle the way he plays."

The tempo of Miles' speech is slow yet precise. "The only reason you hire great players like Darryl, Branford [Marsalis], Omar [Hakim] and Kenny [Kirkland] is because of their spirit... because of the way they play, not because of the way you play.

"You definitely don't hire them for the purpose of trying to make them sound white... and that's what happened. If Sting doesn't want what they got to offer, then he might just as well hire some white folk... Better still, use a sequencer!

"Sting might be doin' something!" he concedes, but argues, "When I look at that band, I see great players and someone shutting 'em up."

He pauses, and thoughtfully rubs his chin. "I wouldn't use 'em like that...but I'm not white!"

When, next day, Branford Marsalis is informed on the musings of Miles, he is noticeably shocked. But, with a shrug of the shoulders, he attempts to make light of the situation.

"That's Miles, isn't it?"

Most certainly.

Davis on the balcony of his apartment overlooking Manhattan's Central Park

BETTMANN / GETTY

> "Most black guys can only play like Jimi Hendrix, and not too long"

IF *TUTU*, HIS masterful funk-filled Warner Brothers debut, honours the good African Archbishop, the title of Miles' last CBS album denounced New York's Police Department; *You're Under Arrest* being a public put-down of those cops who frequently flag down his black Ferrari to harass Miles. The scenario is odious – the only reason a black man could be driving such an expensive set of wheels is because it was heist.

Over the 40 years, during which he has consistently reinvented the most vital area of contemporary music in his own inquisitive image, Miles has never disguised the fact that he has no great love of white American society: the hypocrisy, the back-handed liberalism, the downright lies.

He also avoids applying the term jazz to his current stance. If, for the sake of inaugurating a new browser bin marker, his music must be tagged, then tag it "social dance music" – but don't expect any detailed explanation. Jazz, Miles opines, is now nothing but a white terminology for a black tradition.

Discuss music with Miles and he persistently places great emphasis on the distinct characteristics inherent in black and white players. And you either employ or avoid a faction on the basis of their specific qualities or the lack of them.

Many see such statements as racist, others as bullshit. Miles is on record as mistaking a record by Phil Woods for a black altoist, Sun Ra as a dodgy Euro-band ("we wouldn't play no shit like that") and insisting that Earth, Wind & Fire would kick more ass had they included a couple of white trumpet players among their number.

And what's to be made of a wild rumour of a recent gig, at which Miles allegedly halted his band to holler, "Get that muthafuckin' nigger off stage," when an uninvited Wynton Marsalis ignored Miles' original decision not to allow him to jam!

Then there's the question of three out of Miles' seven sidemen being young, gifted and white. As it transpires, Miles isn't about to curb his enthusiasm for his latest guitar player – former LA Express man Robben Ford.

So why Ford as opposed to any number of black guitarists?

"Most black guys can only play like Jimi Hendrix, and then for not too long," is his dismissive one-liner. Ford, according to Miles, is possessed of three distinct styles, ranging from complex chord clusters through to a deft BB King single-string stroke.

"Robben has the knack of playing the right things in the right style at the right moment. Another thing he has going for him – he doesn't overplay. He's an exceptional musician... a rare find. Some nights, I just end up listening to him."

Recommendations don't come much higher.

THOSE INVITED INTO Miles' Manhattan household come away talking about how the only albums they ever see lying around are the latest pop ones. Of late, it appears that the Man's listening pleasure stretches to Earth, Wind & Fire, D-Train, Ashford & Simpson, Scritti Politti and Prince.

Throughout his career, Miles has always had an ear for those pop songs which he can personalise. His new LP will include a storming interpretation of Scritti Politti's "Perfect Way", if not the promised pairing with his perfectly formed Purple-ness.

It's the contemporary pop performers' ability to make their statement within the self-imposed confines of just a few bars that continues to intrigue him; maybe he's reminded of the days when he and Bird – or, for that matter, the Birth Of The Cool band – had but one side of a single to give it their best shot.

It's horses for courses, and Miles Davis regards himself as a quarter horse thoroughbred. Such horses are skilfully trained to give of their best over a quarter of a mile.

"I think it's easier to do what Prince and Quincy [Jones] produce – and fill in the cracks!"

That's not to infer he doesn't enjoy the luxury of stretching out at will. *Bitches Brew*, in his opinion, succeeded simply because things were allowed to flow naturally within a set of previously formulated cues.

"Prince," he insists, "is also a thoroughbred. He's like an Arabian breed... possesses that extra something.

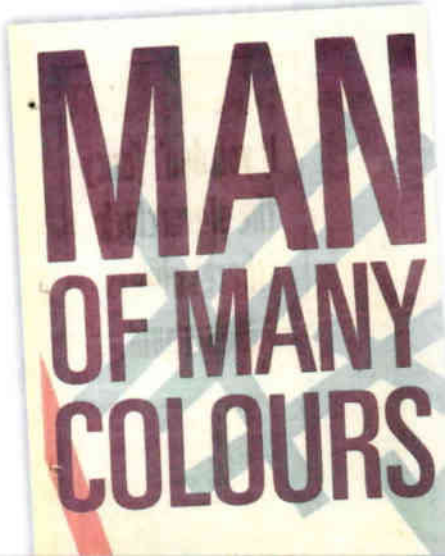
"The first album I gave my nephew Vincent [Miles' drummer] was by James Brown, then I gave him something by Sly. When I listen to Prince, I hear James Brown – but it's updated... modified. I also hear Marvin Gaye, Sly Stone... a whole bunch of other good people. That's the part I like. Just like when you grab a breast of chicken – or whatever part you prefer – and leave the rest. The rest of the stuff I don't like... got no use for it, so out it goes."

Regarding the anticipated outcome of the meeting of the two black music Princes, Miles reveals that we'll have to wait until the rematch.

Prince sent Miles both a vocal and instrumental version of a song entitled "Can I Play With You". Attached to the tape was a note that began: "We think alike. I know how you feel. I know what you're doing..."

Miles stripped down Prince's multi-track, adding his own touch and returned it to the composer for additional vocals. Though approving of what Miles had done with the "chicken breast", when compared to the rest of *Tutu*, Prince vetoed the track, feeling his personal contribution fell short of the overall standard.

"Prince rang me up and said it would be much better if next time the two of us work together in the same studio."



And, there will be a next time.

It could also be that the trumpet player's wish to record with Sinatra will be realised now that they are both on Warners.

"I love the way Sinatra sings – I learned to phrase from listening to all his early recordings."

However, at this juncture, a Miles Davis/Gil Evans reunion appears the most likely prospect. The pair are on red alert, having been invited to perform together, in Florence, before year end.

"When I saw him recently I asked Gil, 'What'll we do?'"

Gil said, "*Tosca*."

Just such a project was under serious discussion 10 years ago, before being indefinitely placed on hold.

"But if Gil tells me we're gonna do it, then it'll get done. If I ask him, he might not have the time to do it."

He gives a knowing smile before fixing me with that much-photographed piercing stare. It's that intense look in the eyes which, he insists, got him the featured role of Ivory Jones in the "Junk Love" episode of *Miami Vice*.

Did the role of the unsavoury Jones come easy?

"The part where I was the pimp!"

It's that stare again.

"Nothing but a street thing. I used to do a little bit of that," referring to Jones' onscreen lifestyle. "Came real easy. When you wanna cop drugs, who's got the best drugs... what street... what whore... It's just a matter of style.

"In *Miami Vice*, all I had to do was put on the clothes and look and talk like I always do!"

Fancy!

THEN THERE'S THE question of *Aura* – an orchestral tribute to Miles which the honoured party recorded with the Danish composer Palle Mikkelborg, in Copenhagen, February '85.

According to Miles, it's as much the attitude shown by CBS to this project as their stance in general ("made me feel like a tax loss") that prompted The Man With The Horn to terminate a 30-years-long association with the label on less than amicable terms.

As to whether *Aura* will serve as a final contract filler or if CBS have easy access to a vault of unimaginable taped treasures isn't forthcoming at this time. Miles is more irritated with the events surrounding the making of *Aura* and its non-appearance.

When CBS refused to contribute towards production costs, Miles reluctantly utilised a $20,000 grant from the National Endowment For The Arts. It therefore doesn't appear unreasonable that Miles won't hand over the tapes until CBS make specific guarantees.

"We've instructed CBS not to fuck it up by naming it *con-temp-o-rary jaaaaazzzzz*," he slurs, "which is what they want to do.

"If it's released right, it's one of those albums that'll be around for a long time. But... everyone wants to label everything. CBS figure everything is automatic. I'm black, I play trumpet, so right away I must be *jaaa-zzzzz*. Even with his all-black band, Sting's rock. Why? Because he's *white*, he *sings*, he plays *guitar*.

"The mentality I encountered was, it's gotta be jazz or jazz rock or classical jazz or Benny Goodman kind of swing... Paul Whiteman King Of *Jaaa-zzzzz* shit or rock'n'roll or whatever..." His voice trails off in disgust.

Though no rivalry existed between the two players, boardroom power play attempted to elevate the status of Wynton Marsalis as spunky contender persistently snapping at the ankles of Davis, the entrenched champion.

"Trouble is," snarls Miles, "George Butler [record producer] is feedin' Wynton all that shit – makin' him sound like an old man, especially when he says all jazz musicians are supposed to wear a suit and tie... then you're right back into slavery.

"Wear 'em to please whom? The white man or those people up in Harlem?"

"Sure," he adds, "Wynton's a fine musician, but not my kind of man."

And, there's the oft-quoted anecdote that has Butler calling up Miles at home with a request to phone Wynton.

Why, Miles enquired.

Because, said Butler, it's Wynton's birthday.

"Is that so?" Click. Buuurrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr. *Roy Carr* •

ALBUMS REVIEW 1986

A slow, stately lyricism

MM OCT 11 Miles' latest, *Tutu*, has a lovely tone – and "wallops and worms of squabbling sound".

Miles Davis
Tutu WARNER BROS

Exquisite Miles once again in a dubious context. His personal playing – and there is plenty of it on *Tutu* – is as inventive and tonally ravishing as anything he's recorded since his comeback. Old jazzers will wish they had the equipment to tune out the banks of synthesizers and pile-driver percussion everywhere in his path, while rising jives will probably feel all that reflects the world they live in better than Paul Chambers, Ron Carter, Philly Joe or Tony Williams.

According to the credits, the session seems to have been mainly Miles, various specialists in the ship-crack and handclap style of percussion, and lots of little red and green lights winking on and off from the synths. Is Miles jousting with a soprano sax on "Full Nelson", or is it synthesized? Michael Urbaniak gets a credit for electric violin on "Don't Lose Your Mind", so presumably he didn't just phone in a bluesy circuit or two.

Oddly enough, the overall feeling of the album is romantic, despite all the wallops and worms of squabbling sound in the foreground. A sad, slow, stately lyricism processes through the mosaic arrangements, and no doubt all sorts of these could be written about the tragedy of the individual in the metallic heart of the modern city.

There's quite a bit of vox *humana*-style exhalation from the machines – Miles' own unmistakeable croak appears once on "Full Nelson" – and this sighing contributes to the romance. The tunes aren't memorable, though fragments of melody are.

"Portia" sounds like a slowed-down version of "Chicago (That Toddling Town)" shorn of the last notes, while "Tomaas" comes on like a radically reprocessed movie theme. "Tutu" is in the manner grand, but certainly doesn't evoke the plucky little Bishop for me.

"Tomaas" comes on like a radically reprocessed movie theme

"Splatch" and "Perfect Way" are brutally stompy, with a lot of stop-start unsettlement from the drums, and both find the leader drilling bullseyes with stinging accuracy. Marcus Miller's arrangements uncover several interestingly discordant moments, as when Miles banks up against a substantial clash of chords and establishes harmony on "Splatch", and on other numbers seems to lance electronic structures that puddle and squash out as he passes.

Miles' sound is everything you could want, and sometimes balloons right into the ear. This is obviously how he likes his stuff to sound these days, and there's plenty of challenge for him to negotiate these musical obstacles.

The famous Irving Penn has taken cover shots that bore right into the leader's pores.

Brian Case

Madonna on the set of the video for "Papa Don't Preach", May 1986

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ALBUMS

Madonna True Blue SIRE

"So I'm here looking through an old picture frame/Waiting for a perfect view/I hope something special will come into my life/Another fine edition of you" (from "Editions Of You" by Roxy Music)

So what is the appeal of Madonna, they ask, as they toss the LP in my direction.

What, you mean Madonna the sophisticat's kitsch-appeal pop star, the picture to occupy the same space on the wall as the three clay ducks above the fireplace – a knowing, ironic wink at prole culture?

Or do you mean Madonna, the screen-printed photograph in which every coloured dot is the stain of a teenage wet dream, the bloom of a fantasy of sex, escape and stardom?

Or do you mean Madonna, the postmodern pop star, Andy Warhol's infinitely reproducible dream of the totally frivolous, totally famous, the perfect image.

Or do you mean Madonna, the link between the New York of rock culture – the rock'n'roll dream of *Desperately Seeking Susan* – and the New York of the Night Of The Living Yuppie?

Which Madonna do you mean, precisely? The one who just walked down my high street? The Japanese version I saw take her clothes off in a strip bar one night in Tokyo? Or this year's model, as displayed on the cover of *True Blue*, the tragic star in shades of blonde and pale blue, blood-drained skin and blood-red lipstick?

Of course, there are those who will tell you that the only Madonna who matters is the one capable of crafting a perfect pop song, pure and simple, pouting and sexual – and she's here, alright, on "Papa Don't Preach" and "White Heat". But I can't help thinking she'd be a momentary diversion if it weren't for the myths she wraps around herself. All the other Madonnas keep getting in the way, and it's them I find more interesting. Madonna, like Grace Jones, now makes records that are about her advertising campaigns – about the image of the Madonnas.

In fact my first taste of this LP was outside the tube station, where I was confronted with a bank of Madonna faces that announced the record's arrival. No words were necessary, just the image of Madonna being Marilyn, announced in gaudy Warholian pink and yellow. It's a testament to how fully Madonna's image has penetrated our unconscious that it's immediately recognisable as Madonna, rather than just another Warhol Marilyn.

What Warhol captured about Monroe was not her personality (except in negative), but the sheer iconic power of her image, and it's that status that Madonna aspires to. Music is the medium, but stardom is the message (and the massage). Madonna, in the true soap opera fashion of stardom, announces her marital bliss on her record sleeve ("This album is dedicated to my husband, the coolest guy in the universe"), while exposing her heartbreak to nightclubs full of gossip columnists ("MADONNA HEADS FOR BREAK-UP DUE TO HUSBAND PENN'S DRINK PROBLEM").

"You're the one I'm dreaming of/Your heart fits me like a glove," she croons on the title track, as she fills the gossip inches with the heartbreak of a love affair drowning in alcohol. And it all fits so perfectly with the image of Marilyn, the tragic superstar.

Inevitably, given the backdrop that she's fashioned herself (a thousand TV screens, all showing a different image of MADONNA), the songs themselves simply add to the show, rather than starring in it. Madonna can equal Prince anyday when it comes to brass-necking it out, all guns blazing, but her sensitive moments lack his mystery and imagination.

But it no longer matters that "Where's The Party" sounds like a formula (everything about Madonna is a formula) or that "Jimmy Jimmy" is a synthesis of the "He's A Rebel" rock'n'roll myth (Madonna is a myth synthesis).

Madonna has long transcended the realms of mere music. She is the Reproducible Girl. And the poster campaign is inspired.

Don Watson, NME Jul 12

Wham! The Final Wham! EPIC

Whatever else, there are some things they can't take away from Wham!. They may have made real prats of themselves in the meantime, but Wham! still gave us "Wham! Rap" and "Young Guns Go For It", anthems of a sort of youthful optimism and both brilliant, BRILLIANT singles.

Odd now to imagine it, but "Young Guns" in particular seemed to signify a bold new dream for the pop ethos, with its stirring brashness and admirable arrogance in the face of adversity while intelligently doffing the cap to the exciting new black raps coming out of New York. Have pride in the dole queue was the message, and it hit a nerve that touched all our hearts.

Which is exactly why such scorn was heaped upon George and Andy when they dumped the incorrigible sense of fun and adventure in favour of Club Tropicana and fake suntans and contrived videos and shuttlecocks down the shorts. When Wham! said they didn't want to be credible, they wanted to be rich and famous, the music press and all who sailed in her felt betrayed. And in truth "Bad Boys" and "Club Tropicana" were pretty appalling.

On this double album compilation, the corpse is barely cold but the marketing clean-up goes on. "Wham! Rap" and "Young Guns" sound like museum pieces –you smile at the naivety and rejoice at the memory. Nobody's saying George and Andrew should have spent their lives remaking dole queue raps, but the crude ruthlessness with

TERRY MCGINNIS / GETTY

HAM!

which they set about selling themselves as pop pin-ups was damn offensive.

Listening back over the 15 tracks, it is possible now to make a balanced judgement on their worth as a pure pop song, and while their sound was always alarmingly thin and Michael's voice too weak to successfully carry off something as vigorous as "I'm Your Man", Wham! were a cut above the norm. It was their unyielding gift for self-promotion that was so obnoxious, not necessarily their records.

"Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go", for example, had wit and originality and the mawkish "Last Christmas" astutely integrated the traditions of Motown into Michael's unerring ear for compelling chorus lines and his penetrating eye for a sure-fire commercial banker.

The key to the whole thing and the track that doomed Andrew Ridgeley is, of course, "Careless Whisper". Crushingly sentimental, it nevertheless oozed class, gave George Michael instant respect as a songwriter and set him firmly on the path to being the new Paul McCartney. It must have been "Careless Whisper" and the reaction to it that convinced George that he had a deeper role to play than bouncing up and down alongside the vacuous Ridgeley.

All history now, of course, and there's already a sense of nostalgia about the tracks here – 12-inch versions of "Wham! Rap", "Young Guns", "Bad Boys", "Careless Whisper", "Last Christmas", "Everything She Wants" and "Freedom" – making it the perfect party record, even if the packaging is disappointingly tacky.

I suspect that in future years Wham! nostalgia will reach unforeseen heights... You may very well have loathed them, but they will still have been responsible for the soundtrack to your youth, and that is more important than music alone. Cheers, boys. *Colin Irwin*

Romford's Five Star: strangers to "the whiff of the barmaid's apron"

SINGLES

Arcadia The Flame (Remix) PARLOPHONE

The trouble is that someone has already written "Shaft". And much as I adore the chaps from Arcadia (continued lunchtime in the Ladies...) *MM Jul 12*

James So Many Ways SIRE

No doubt about it: James are fruitcakes. Gifted fruitcakes. For all of its peculiarities, its extraordinary yodelling, its rhythmic eccentricity, this highly certifiable single is at the same time cohesive and eminently agreeable. It works for all the reasons it shouldn't, turning the occasionally grim task of reviewing singles into something of a worthwhile occupation. *MM Jul 12*

SINGLES REVIEW 1986

The Fall Living Too Late BEGGARS BANQUET

It's a mystery to me that The Fall still exist, that people still listen to the bastards, that people ever listened to them in the first place. "Living Too Late" is a morose riff and dour vocal, while "Living Too Long" drones interminably. "Hot Aftershave Bop", the remaining track on this 12-inch-only release, shows a touch more spirit and makes you wonder if, one day, Mark E Smith is going to invent a tune – an entertaining notion. Definitely more entertaining than anything to be found on the record. *MM Jul 12*

The Wedding Present This Boy Can Wait RECEPTION

A frenzied guitar ushers in a breathless vocal and neither goes away throughout this prime slice of Leeds indie pop, free at last from the Gang Of Four hangover that has dogged so many of that city's favourite sons, and now veering more towards a deranged folkies-on-speed extravaganza that overstays its welcome by just about the right amount. The B-side is called "You Should Always Keep In Touch With Your Friends", which is sound advice, and again it's like some sort of folk music gone mad with lots of room for the omnipresent guitar to clang about in. If I had enough to drink I think I would probably die watching this band play live. *MM Jul 26*

Five Star Find The Time RCA

The best thing to come out of Romford since interesting Davis march triumphantly on with their sure-fire formula of taking all the best bits of The Jacksons and wrapping them up in a moral code that makes Victoria Gillick look like Cynthia Payne. Still, if all this abstinence means they keep on churning out little gems like "Find The Time" then I hope the sniff of the barmaid's apron eludes them for a few years yet. *MM Jul 26*

The Smiths Panic ROUGH TRADE

Just when you thought it was safe to write off The Smiths as the ultimate albums band, here comes "Panic" to re-establish Morrissey and Marr as undisputed champions of pop's most viral art form. As well as being thoroughly superior to the rest of this week's crop, "Panic" should also finally knock the dour bastards myth on the head once and for all. The very thought of Morrissey ever getting involved in anything more dangerous than a nosebleed is funny enough, but when he brings the young lad in at the end for the "*hang the DJ*" chant, it's impossible not to join in and echo the sentiments of anyone who has ever once attended a youth club disco. "*The music that they constantly play says nothing to me about my life*," croons Mo, but a few blasts of "Panic" and that particular situation will soon be put to rights. Johnny Guitar hasn't sounded as damned EMPHATIC since "Hand In Glove", and with "Vicar In A Tutu" and a ludicrous instrumental funk workout on the 12-inch, it sounds as if The Smiths are back with a vengeance. Brilliant. *MM Jul 26*

REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

"On occasion, it can get wild"

The BEASTIE BOYS are rap's most notorious outlaws. But behind the outrage, a fractionally more sensitive picture emerges. "We never actually get any girls... The Beastie Boys have never really, y'know, actually... y'know..."

— MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 13 —

"HEY, Y'KNOW DAT guy I know who murdered dat girl in Central Park? He didn't do it."

"Huh?"

"He didn't do it, right? It says in da papers dat he says he was screwing her in da Park an' she grabbed his balls an' she was really squeezin', y'know, really squeezin' an' she wouldn't let go, so he kinda got her in a sorta headlock and kinda strangled her by accident."

"Huh?"

"He says it was an accident."

"Her dress was torn to shreds, her bra was wrapped round her neck... That don' sound like no accident to me."

"'S what he says."

"Look, even if some girl is squeezin' your balls, you don' strangle her with her bra... I mean, there are some things a dude does and some things a dude doesn'."

The Beastie Boys not so beastie after all? Seems so, though the last time this brat pack of NYHM rappers set foot on our shores, they managed to upset and outrage most of the nice record company and music press people it was worth outraging and upsetting. They smeared taramasalata over their guests at their highly hyped PA at the now defunct Embassy (a five-minute appearance, incidentally, which amounted to little more than a spirited effusion of four-letter words over a rampant beat box), they talked a lot about titties and crack and they made an awful mess of their hotel rooms, redecorating the Chelsea Holiday Inn with a variety of sarnies. Wild old stuff.

"So what are people expecting of us when we go back there now?" asks Mikey D, the cute-looking Beastie.

Oh, wild behaviour, that sort of thing.

"But why, why?" asks MCA, the dude in the shades who acts like he wishes he'd been old enough to serve in 'Nam.

Because you did things that hadn't been seen since...

"Led Zeppelin!" Ad-Rock enthuses. He's the kid, the pudge playground push-you-around.

"No, more like the Sex Pistols!" This is Sean, their English road manager, a mini-Kosmo Vinyl who grew up before his time doing dates with The Clash and The Specials.

"Look, the Beastie Boys go to England to have a good time. We were »

WARING ABBOTT / GETTY

The Beastie Boys in 1986: (l–r) Michael Diamond (aka Mike D), Adam Yauch (MCA) and Adam Horovitz (Ad-Rock)

on holiday, travellin' around."

So that explains the chicken?

"Where d'you hear about dat?"

Oh, here and there.

"Yeah, OK. We went shoppin' to the store to buy food to eat and we couldn' believe it because in one store they had dis entire cooked chicken for sale. Now you don' see dis too much, except in New York, wrapped in plastic, so I bought da chicken 'cos it seemed really funny, and we ate just, like, one wing because it was really bad and we were lookin' out dis' window – da windows opened up really huge – and we seen dis dude walkin' down da street in, like, a bowler hat an' a tuxedo carrying a walkin' stick an' he was, like, so proper it seemed really funny, so I threw the chicken at him."

"Yeah, it was right off Sloane Street, so there was no reason not to."

Score a bullseye?

"I think it landed, like, one foot in front of him with a ch-u-u-u-u-u-mp!"

Aaah, and I thought it was a live chicken.

"You thought it was a live chicken? Dat would have been incredible! Wouldn't it have been cool if we'd had a live chicken and its wings were clipped so it couldn't fly?"

The Beasties are on their home patch, sipping mushroom-and-barley soup in Kiev, a Polish cafe in Greenwich Village, five minutes' legwork from Washington Square where the black punks with green Mohicans hang out. Crack Central until recently when the cops cleaned it up.

"Now you have to go down onto Sixth. You can't walk there at nights now without someone jumpin' out on you."

WE SHOULD BE in Providence, Rhode Island, right now. The Boys should be playing, part of the Raising Hell Tour which has been grossing like a good 'un across America, a package that features fellow rapturists Run DMC, Whodini and LL Cool J. Trouble is, they pulled the plugs. There'd been big trouble. There'd been scuffles in Philly, a slight fracas in Atlanta, but the guns came out in Long Beach, California, the outskirts of LA. Stories differ as to the exact nature and extent of the bloodshed, depending on your source.

The national press in America made a meal of it – deaths, race riots, that sort of thing. The lady from the record company, towing the DMC line, claims there were no deaths, that the heavy arms were outside the hall and that it had nothing to do with the artists or their fans.

The Beasties tell it like this: "Long Beach was a gang war. You don't really get gangs in New York, but in LA there's all these gangs and, uh, one was inside the place watching the concert and another was trying to get in to settle some kinda beef, but they couldn't because the security on the door knew they were some sorta gang, so about 200 people bomb-rushed the back door and came running in with, like, knives and sticks an' stuff and attacked the other gang just as Whodini went on. The gangs were just running around hitting all the fans, just attacking everybody in the whole place.

"The only thing you can compare it to in England is, like, a football match where you have two groups trying to get each other and a whole bunch of innocent people get caught in-between."

Whatever the body count, whether the security guards did or did not employ metal detectors to keep out the hard stuff, whether or not it was a pre-planned military invasion from outta town with gang colours hidden until they were inside, the trouble was enough to see the tour cancelled in other cities – retribution from the City Fathers that, understandably, the Beastie Boys deplore.

"On occasion, it can get wild. I don't really think it's our fans, though. Our show is just a rock 'n' roll show. These gangs could crash the gates on Run DMC, Janet Jackson or Cameo."

Nonetheless, the Beasties' reputation precedes them as the Raising Hell Tour hits Hammersmith this weekend. Oddball enough as the only seriously hard white rap act in the entire universe, the Beasties have gone out of their way to make their way, rubbing the powers that be up the wrong way, saying all the wrong things, irritating and baiting and boasting and bragging.

As their Svengali/fairy-godfather/producer Rick Rubin of the Def Jam label says on their intro video to the Brit music biz: "The Beastie Boys are a NEW music group. They're not just a rock group, they're everything you want 'em to be. Any category, they fit."

In other words, they don't fit at all.

Their brash collision of heavy rock riffs, cranked up into the red, distorted into crackling thunder, Bonhamesque, Beelzebub bass drums and snotty-nosed macho rapping comes at the so-called fourth-world funk from the other side of the segregated school bus. They were into Kiss and cottoned onto Clinton, whereas Run was into Kurtis Blow and fell for the bombast of Bad Company.

Some hear "She's On It" and hear a truly cosmopolitan melting pot of street styles, a way forward forged from a shedding of prejudice. Others, like David Toop in his premature book *Rap Attack*, hear racism, chauvinism, even the gross breast-beating belches of rank misogynists. Me, I hear a damn up racket and a wicked laugh. Puerile, yes, but alive, alive-o.

"We talk about girls a lot, yeah, it's a large part of our lives. Especially MCA. I think he has most problems?"

Problems?

"Uh, I just seem to find myself involved wid several different relationships at da same time, which usually makes for a pretty funny scene."

It has been said, though, that the Beasties' attitude towards women leaves a lot to be desired.

"Whaddaya mean? Have you got anything off a British girl, ever?"

Got? What? Explain.

"You ever got to first base?"

"Did you ever actually, uh, put your hand under a girl's titty?"

Well, now you come to mention it...

"What's it like?"

"Are English girls any different from American girls?"

Can't say I'm that conversant with the Yankee gal, carnally.

"No, really, I wanna know for myself," Ad-Rock pleads. "I mean, y'know, I didn't learn dis in school."

You mean the Beasties didn't have their evil way on their last visit?

"We never actually get any girls... The Beastie Boys have never really, y'know, never really, actually... y'know..."

> "You grow up in NYC and, well, when I was 13 I was selling drugs"

There's a lot of locker-room wank about the Beasties, as the vid for "She's On It" shows – boys disrespectful of womanhood because they don't understand it, but more than anything, boys acting the way they figure boys ought to act. The Beastie Boys, like Madness, like The Monkees, are very much conscious caricatures of the era they exist in. They're all the tensions and trends blown larger than life, to reflect on and laugh at, an escape from the norm by a gross exaggeration of the normal.

They don't mean what they say, but they sometimes say what they mean. They're tickled pink by the product of their outrage as long as their reputation sets them apart, on the ascent. But if the going gets tough, the Beasties come clean.

"Do people really think we do a lot of drugs in England?" asks Ad-Rock.

Yup.

"Is that their impression? Well, there are definitely a lot of drugs around the Beastie Boys, but us, as a band, we don't."

Mike D smiles but gets real serious when I say, for abstainers, it's mighty odd that their every other sentence is concerned with crack, purified freebase cocaine sold increasingly freely on the New York streets.

"Well, you can't help it. You grow up in New York City and, well, when I was 13, in high school, I was selling drugs."

"I mean hey," growls MCA, "I used to get wasted a lot, buddy. We all used to."

They all look peachy keen and powders clean now, though.

"We are. We don't do it. See, we actually started off singing about it because it seemed sorta funny and cliched, a big rock'n'roll thing, but nobody really got the joke. Everyone assumed that we did drugs all the time, but if you listen to the lyrics, things like '*I'm never dusting out 'cos I torch that crack*' just seemed sorta funny."

"The only problem in America," says Mikey D, "is that we get played a lot on black radio, and for lots of kids who listen to black radio a lot, crack is becoming a real problem. I'm talking about 13-year-old kids. It's really killing them and they don't realise, so at this point I feel there's a responsibility in the band towards that audience since our audience, for sure, is the 15-year-old b-boy in Detroit.

The Beastie Boys feel responsible?

"Yeah, definitely. I feel responsibility towards those people, but I don't feel responsibility towards the trendy person dancing in a club in London. I don't really give a shit if they read *Melody Maker* and get offended because we talk about girls with big tits."

Doubtless the Beasties, like Run DMC, will be involved in entrepreneur extraordinaire Bill Graham's Crack Down concert in New York in autumn, which is another good reason (as if one were needed) to laugh those racist jibes down the lavatory.

"Racist? Now that's what I really don't understand."

MCA has no answer: "I think a lot of people were mad at us about other things. The Beastie Boys are well known for insulting people, because if da three of us get going an' we're in the wrong mood or drunk, we can really ruin someone's day, and we probably severely insulted some reporter...Actually, I can think of quite a few.

"Anyway, da reporter can't exactly write in his article, 'The Beastie Boys insulted me, dey were really mean, I don' like them', so he tries to think of something to write dat's gonna do some damage to our career or somethin'."

"Yeah, and the obvious thing to ruin the Beastie Boys is to point out they're white kids! There are lots of radio programmers and other people out there who would like to see the Beastie Boys fall and not see our records get played on black radio and succeed as we have in front of black audiences."

It's never made clear who these people are or why they seek to do our boys down, but from my experience of the moronic American pop press, I can see how and why the Beasties give them such a hard time and why the jolly inane jocks might take umbrage.

"Look, it's obvious we're not racist."

"I am," says MCA. "I hate white people."

Have the Beasties encountered any problems being the only whiteys in a black genre?

"No, but we got to have the fresh rhymes. Our records have to be almost better than other people's so any kid in the audience won't think, 'Who're these ill white kids?' He'll know it's the Beastie Boys."

So, are they aware they're doing their bit for cross-cultural harmony?

"Uh... it's really scary for us that the audiences at our gigs are really fuckin' young now. You're talkin' maybe eight years old, and both of us and Run DMC are making strictly youth records. I feel responsibility towards that."

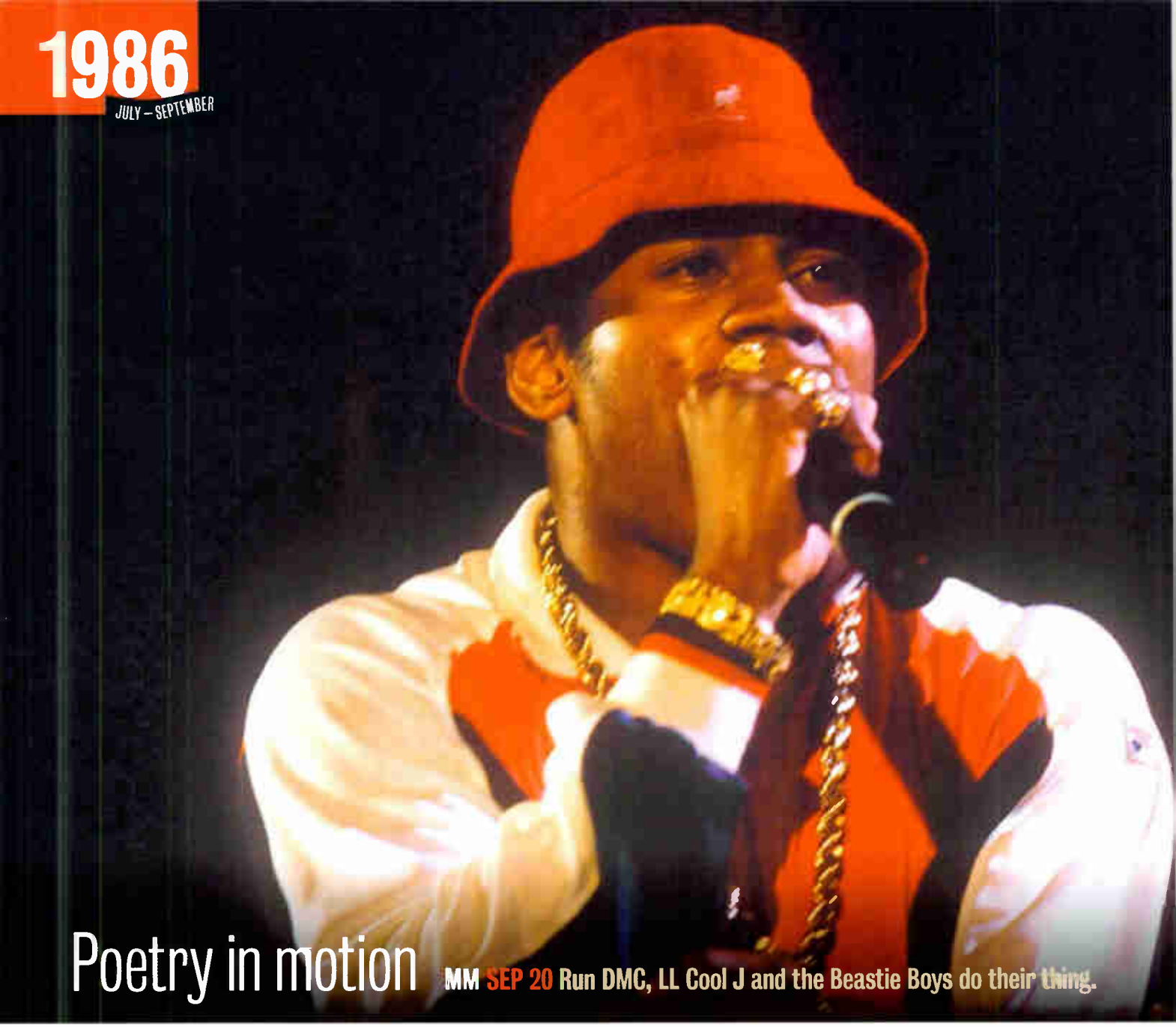
But do the Beasties set a cool example? I mean, I know Run goes on about how they stayed at school and made something of themselves and all, but the Beasties' cartoon capers seem a little over-the-top to be altruistic.

"If you look at us on stage, it's not like we're wearing anything that a kid in the audience can't afford to go out and buy, and I think that's part of it, part of the appeal, that a kid can look at us and say, 'Look at the ill white kids, look what they're wearing... I can go out and buy that.' It's the same with Run DMC."

"We're definitely not like Ozzy Osbourne. If a kid sees him in a seven-thousand-dollar suit and the big boots with the dragons, they can't relate to that, and I don't think that's really rock'n'roll. I think it's a lot more »

JOSH CHEUSE / REX FEATURES

Stretching the definition of hip hop: the Beasties on Long Beach, Long Island, New York



Poetry in motion

MM SEP 20 Run DMC, LL Cool J and the Beastie Boys do their thing.

HEY WHITE BOY, what you doing uptown? Hey white boy, you chasing our music around?

Didn't we long to believe it, eh? Weren't we just the keen ones to grab a vicarious thrill, us middle-class whiteys shaking among the Stanley knife Yo Boys and living to tell the tale? Weren't we the bold ones getting hip to the dark-skinned hop, acquiring instant credit as the new noise antiquated all our pop notions in one pumping instant?

Well, sorry Joe, no go. When The Raisin' Hell Tour hit Hammersmith, it was painfully apparent that there's been a bad load of shit written about rap, a pile of sociological wishful theorising about the collision and collusion of styles, about the beat being all and the star being usurped by the scratch of a disc, about body language bypassing the brain, about the rapture of rhythm evaporating the evil of ego.

What the Raisin' Hell Tour proved was not only is hip hop poetry in motion, having already cemented its own vocabulary, but that its behaviour conforms exactly to tradition. As smug as Saxon or Status Quo and greeted with similar undiscerning adulation, RUN DMC have become a lunk-head heavy metal ceremonial sham mighty quickly.

As Jam Master Jay cranked down the grind, they'd pick a fraudulent beef with some poor punter to spur their next yawn of aggression and the nadir came when they all slouched off after half an hour and pretended the authorities were trying to prevent them returning. Run admonishing the audience to point at some hapless figure in the shadows backstage and yell "Fuck you!" before launching into some more strutting stuff.

Like Quo, the greatest thing about Run DMC is their audience. During a turgid "My Adidas", the multitude whipped off their trainers and held them aloft for benediction, but I felt they were robbed when "Walk This Way" was truncated after a cursory chorus, hurried through without humour. Slob superstars, they got away with murder.

In contrast, LL COOL J wasn't cool at all, but startlingly forthright and raring to innovate. With Cut Creator splicing and dicing, never once dropping the beat (unlike Jam Master Jay who, in his conceit, often lumbered into directionless thunder), LL was cultivated, cheeky and creative.

When he waggled his willy inside his track suit, his smile was broad; when he was boasting, he was blasting our bodies like a verbal southpaw, his roaring sentences smarting in our ears.

"Can't Live Without My Radio" was radically lean and loud, the human dynamo furiously fluent and harshly pure, his form of rap a blood relation of reggae toasting, whereas, sandwiched between the two biggies, WHODINI were obviously sweetmeat, presumably there to add some variety to the inescapable monotony of the genre. They simply didn't belong as they did a lot of Spanish marching about and told us repeatedly they were taking no prisoners while the marvellous crowd bombarded them with an enthusiastic barrage of whistles and car horns.

"The Beastie Boys' cartoon capers were real dangerous, they risked their lives"

FARUAD KANUGA / REX FEATURES

LL Cool J: "cultivated, cheeky and creative"

HAMMERSMITH ODEON LONDON

LIVE!

SEPTEMBER 12

But, after the HM pomp, the real roots thing and the mild pop spoof, it was the **BEASTIE BOYS'** gold old punk rap that really shook the living daylights out of the formularised dance. They'd done a brief 10 minutes at Hammersmith, but hours later, at three in the morning, they performed their entire 20 minutes in Delirium, a club in the old Astoria Theatre on Charing Cross Road. While 500 or so stood out in the rain, the full house heaved to the Beasties' beautiful chaos.

Run DMC had already stormed the DJ. Whodini were attempting to get in on the act and LL was ranting off to the side before the whole shebang was forcibly silenced, a tiny space cleared and the Beasties launched in.

Smack! Somewhere, somehow in the mayhem, the Boys emerged with a mean "Slow And Low", a crackling "Cookie Puss" and the hefty new "New Style", taking the piss out of all they'd seen, all they were doing, all the dumb cliches and sad macho poses.

The Beastie Boys' cartoon capers were real dangerous, they risked their lives and others' limbs in a hilarious on-heat howl of protest to make something happen. Their anti-rap attitude, ransacking riffs, was justified and joyous. Rap needs the crap kicked out of it. Haste ye back, wee Beasties, while you're still in the raw. *Steve Sutherland*

rock'n'roll seeing us, because pretty much all the males that go and see a Run DMC/ Beastie Boys concert wanna MC or DJ."

Is this, perhaps, why the Raising Hell Tour has been so phenomenally successful, while others, with more established lineups, are bombing out?

"Yeah, maybe. We always seem to mysteriously find ourselves on the biggest tour of the year. Last year we were on the Madonna tour, and that got more press than anything, it was a huge, big deal, and now we're on the Raising Hell Tour, which is the huge, big deal of this summer. What next? I don't know."

Sean, who's wearing a Chelsea kit ("Not the new one, the thin stripes on the old one are more fly") likens the tour to nothing he's seen since 2-Tone, all the bands interacting, working from a common paranoia and purpose.

"We're all like family, because we're all under the same management and we all work together. Run is actually writing some songs for us and we wrote Whodini a song, so we all hang out together a lot."

I KNOW WHAT THEY'LL wear over here – the obligatory jock caps, the Adidas trainers (unlaced, of course) and the jeans, unzipped and pulled down off the waist to reveal boxer shorts, preferably paisley – but I wonder if they'll wear well. Maybe this bastard-brat offspring of *Sesame Street* and the Sex Pistols is much too much an indigenous American accident to catch on?

"No. When we were in London eight months ago, or however long it was, I was meeting kids right and left who rapped – it's one of the only forms of music that really new stuff keeps coming out of. I'm always amazed – every time I turn on the radio, there's some rap record that's got some new idea in it, something I would never think of that takes it in a completely different direction.

"The rap audience is definitely the most discriminating around," Mikey D continues. "They don't wanna hear something they've already heard, they don't wanna hear the cliches. It's kinda at a cool stage right now because we have rap groups established enough to have their own audience and a distinct sound, but at the same time, everything changes so fast. If Run DMC were to put out an album that's exactly the same as their first, they'd be over. They have to keep changing."

As, of course, do the Beasties. Even granting their crucial role in legitimising rap for whites in a country handicapped by racial prejudice on the radio, the boys can't afford to lean back and chill out. Hence their forthcoming album, *Licensed To Ill*, is harder and heavier than "Cookie Puss" or "She's On It", a rumbling surge of bravado and piracy.

They play me a tape in a massive pool hall called Julian's, a warehouse up some piss-stained stairs peopled by geezers in bowlers and sideys, *Clockwork Orange* for real, and my favourite track as the balls purr into pockets is "Rhymin' And Stealin'", a maxi-decibel stomp through gang cliches.

"It's just the hardest," says Mikey D. "I don't think it'll go on the radio. See, this is where we get our stuff. It's real. Where the Beastie Boys live, what's around us? OE, Old English, cheap beer, Riceroni, Captain Crunch and people selling crack in the park."

But is it enough to document, or are they passing comment?

"I think we're basically trying to document ourselves," says MCA. "We're not trying to document what everybody else is doing or what's going on in the world in South Africa or whatever – it's just the three of us having a good time and doing music about it."

What would the Beasties like to do?

"We really wanna do sitcom. Def Jam and CBS were gonna split the cost and just run it on MTV, hoping to sell it to a network..."

"D'you know what they're doing on Channel Five, Fox Television? Making new episodes of *The Monkees*!"

"Yeah, I hear they recast it. It's ridiculous. Did you see the new Monkees video? It's only Peter and Mickey and, oh my God, it was really the fuckin' worst thing I've ever seen. It was really milking the dead cow – some things should be left to lie."

Meanwhile, the Beasties are featured in *Tougher Than Leather*, a mystery movie in which the boys play light relief to Run DMC's murder plot, they're listening to a lot of Smiley Culture and Pato Banton ("The English MCs really win the whole thing"), doing their damnedest to recreate some of the Led Zep through reading *Hammer Of The Gods*, and doing battle with CBS, who mixed their idea for a gatefold double debut LP to be called *Double-Barrelled Fresh*.

So, what wouldn't the Beasties do?

"If I had the choice to do it over again, I probably wouldn't go to see *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part II*," says Mikey D. "It really wasn't as good as I expected. Not enough use of the chainsaw."

"Hey, d'you think Eddie Murphy's a faggot? Seriously. We met him on tour and he was, like, after LL Cool J all the time. Like, it could have been an act, but he was at it all night, an' if he was putting it on, then he was real good at it."

The penultimate word goes to Rick Rubin, the man who kicked it all off, the man behind the Beasties, the man with an instinct for the commerciality of controversy: "Ill, that means to be wild. Could be good, could be bad, depending on your point of view."

No sleep till Hammersmith. *Steve Sutherland* •

David Byrne is your unnamed guide to the fictional Texas town of Virgil in his film *True Stories*

"A licence to dress however you want"

TALKING HEADS man DAVID BYRNE has made a movie, *True Stories*, in which he investigates America. But is he turning into a yuppie? "I like of lot of the same things that yuppies are supposed to like. I'm on dangerous ground!"

— NME SEPTEMBER 6 —

COMING SOON TO a cinema near you is one of this year's funniest yet most thought-provoking films. It is called *True Stories*, and is a mosaic of pilfered, hybridised ideas and images which add up to a surprisingly coherent whole.

Its director and co-writer is a slim, 34-year-old New Yorker of casually smart attire, faintly greying black hair and the deepest cow-brown eyes I've ever seen.

He is David Byrne, who for the last 11 years has been otherwise employed as singer, guitarist and songwriter for the rock group Talking Heads. Rock stars making movies? Never mind such half-baked dilettanti as Bowie, Dylan and Prince; David Byrne proves that in this age of over-specialisation the Renaissance Ideal remains bloody but unbowed. The Jonathan Miller of pop, anyone?

It all started back when Talking Heads were touring in 1983, as immortalised in Jonathan Demme's award-winning documentary *Stop Making Sense*. David Byrne used to divert himself from the rigours of the road by collecting those kooky believe-it-or-not anecdotes that form the staple of such American tabloid newspapers as the *Weekly World News*. "Baby Born With Two Heads!", "Boy Whose Earmuffs Took World By Storm!", that sort of thing.

At the same time, Byrne was already increasingly interested in the theatrical and cinematic arts as exemplified by the *Stop Making Sense* stageshow and the promotional videos he directed with dazzling inventiveness for "Burning Down The House", "This Must Be The Place" and "Road To Nowhere". He was now thinking in visual images, which he would sketch and store for some future use.

Thus the raw material for *True Stories*, an unreliable anthology if literal verisimilitude is what you're after. But not quite pure fiction either. »

MOVIESTORE / REX SHUTTERSTOCK

True Stories defies a ready pigeonhole, combining several genres: documentary, satire, musical, drama and fantasy. Robert Altman's *Nashville*, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and the films of Fellini offer a few cross-references.

Threading through all of these is our host/narrator, David Byrne himself. Whether on an amiable stroll through town or, even more uncharacteristically of this erstwhile paragon of brainily twitching nerdishness, relaxed at the wheel of his open-top car, Byrne's coathanger frame is racily upholstered in a sharpshooting suit, bootlace tie, hand-tooled cowboy boots and high, wide and handsome Stetson hat.

Why does he look like JR Ewing, the archetypal Texan down at the ranch? To puncture the myth that bronco-bucking schmatte is de rigueur in Texas; only showbiz Texans look so corny. A small but telling point. David Byrne sets *True Stories* in the biggest state of the Big Country, not as a New York sharpie mocking the hicks, but the better to tackle the big themes.

What are these big themes? In a roundabout, light-fingered yet penetrating style, some of the facts of life of America today.

I wouldn't live there if you paid me

"TEXAS DID SEEM to embody a lot of what I was getting at. You had to be very careful about not dragging up a load of Texan cliches. I did try to play with them sometimes. Putting myself in a cowboy outfit was pointing out one of the Texas cliches – that only the out-of-towners think that Texas is filled with cowboys. And we only mentioned oil once!"

He laughs with a bemused inward furtiveness, his discourse always tending to the face-value deadpan style patented by Andy Warhol. But cautious judgements poke through all the time.

"I've just returned to New York after being in either Texas or Los Angeles the last two years, and it's nice to be back. I think I'm familiar enough to get along in the rest of the country, but foreign enough that I still go about kind of bemused when I visit other towns in a lot of America. It's nice that I still find it fresh."

Would not the great mass of Americans resent being represented by an "artist" from precious pinko liberal New York City?

"Yeah, and they're completely justified in that. A lot of New Yorkers think of the rest of the country as a bunch of laughable hicks, although my hope is that you can get a laugh out of them and that they do have something to offer. It's like laughing with them."

There is much to laugh with. Virgil is the collective Texan new town of Byrne's devising: we tour its geography, architecture, economy, pastimes and especially people with a raised eyebrow worthy of Alan Whicker.

"I felt that I had to keep reminding myself and the audience that a lot of the time, though it may look freakish, what I'm actually saying is that I like this. What this person's doing is actually very creative or avant-garde or whatever, but coming from an unsophisticated background. And that deserves some attention or respect."

How, hypothetically, might a Texan filmmaker represent New York?

"Hmmm," pauses the ever-thoughtful Byrne. "One of the things that they would notice right away is the dirt. The London dirt is old, centuries of soot. But New York's dirt is last week's garbage. It's a different feeling; soot doesn't smell so much! Texans would notice how filthy New York is, and how you have these sophisticated people dressing up and going to expensive restaurants, and then you have bums sleeping in doorways and garbage all over the place."

Has his view of "The Big Country" changed since he sung in 1978 that "*I wouldn't live there if you paid me*"?

"No. I've always felt that, depending on what side of the bed you wake up on, you can either look out the window and see things rosy, amusing and wonderful, or you can see it as imperfect and compromised."

That David Byrne is reasonable to a fault makes for slightly bloodless conversation. "Gosh!" is the only outburst he permits himself, and wryness is just about his strongest response.

On the other hand, such self-effacement allows him to subordinate his ego to the demands of the movie. For instance, though all the songs in the film are to be found on the new Talking Heads LP, also titled *True Stories*, they are mostly versions performed by the actors and local gospel, norteño and country musicians. Where Talking Heads actually sing – on the new single "Wild, Wild Life" – what you actually see on film is a hilarious mime competition of the type that has been catching on in nightclubs all over America. And when the band finally get to appear, playing "Love For Sale", they're swiftly deluged in molten chocolate, a metaphor for conspicuous consumption if ever there was one.

But is it also a metaphor for the eclipse of Talking Heads? Just as David Byrne's interests have diversified into scoring modern dance productions, directing videos and now a full-length movie, so too have I found Talking Heads music less and less gripping. Last year's *Little Creatures* LP bopped and joked cheerfully on the right side of monotony, but it didn't exactly stretch the envelope of the band's ability either, unlike their first four diversely brilliant albums.

The backing tracks for the *True Stories* LP were laid down at the same time as *Little Creatures*, and then the aforementioned Texan "found" musicians did their stuff on top, and the actors sung Byrne's songs as written specifically to express their characters as in any opera or musical. Their renditions burst into life with all the twists and nuances no single band or singer could summon. It is curious, then, that Talking Heads should recut the same songs for *True Stories*, inevitably with less lively results.

"Given the choice, I discovered a lot of people would rather hear me singing them, which I find disappointing. I find that sometimes people in the film did something more appropriate to the song, like the guy who played Louis Fyne (John Goodman), his voice gave a more authentic country interpretation of that song ['People Like Us'] than I did.

"But it's also true that a lot of people like to hear the person who wrote the song sing it. So I just felt we were obliged to do it, though I didn't need my arm twisted that much, ha ha!"

David Byrne admits how the rest of the band are wary that their new LP seems to be a mere adjunct – commercial guarantee, perhaps – of his grandiose solo project. For *True Stories* shouldn't be seen as only a brief diversion from Byrne's main job as head Head. On the strength of his video experience, he raised the $1 million shooting budget from his American record company Warner Brothers. The post-production costs, calculated at between a further $1m and $4m (the final sums are yet to be done), were footed by mainstream movie investment. Though still less than half of the Hollywood average of $10m per movie, nor is it peanuts either. Likewise David Byrne's two-year commitment of time.

Such a demanding solo project could only be fitted into the band's schedule given that the songwriting and recording process is not very time-consuming. But Talking Heads haven't toured in three years, nor have any plans to do so until they can think of a novel presentation. So David Byrne feels no urge to play a live crowd for its own sake?

"I probably do, but I forget how much fun it is until I do it, to sing in front of people and they actually like it, ha ha! I forget how enjoyable that is."

Meanwhile, he is keen to make more movies, though as yet with nothing specific in mind. Perhaps less music and more story...

"I started off reading old myths and ones not so old but not so well known, like American Indian legends, the creation myth of the Navajo, something like that. There's some good material there; some of it is kind of sexy but fantastic at the same time..."

People like us

The new patriotism is also a trick. It's a real frightening, scary trick that everyone wants so badly to believe is true. The government is selling the country down the river. The real wealth of the country is in the people.

Empires in retreat get into some pretty weird stuff. Egypt, Rome, England, Japan, Spain, and now the United States. They get this intense pride and nostalgia for what they imagine they were because they can see it slipping away.

America had a lot of free money for a long time. Money that just came out of the ground. In Texas it just shot right out of the ground. All you had to do was look around and find it. When cheap labor ran out, we just brought some more from overseas.

The expansion got a little out of hand, but it's over now. Some of us might have seen the tail end of the heyday, but now most of us can feel reality settling in.

Some people think it's the end of the world... David Byrne *in* True Stories, *the book of the film*

IN AMONG THE jokily exploding Texan myths and meditations upon high technology and cities and roads, deeper themes emerge. David Byrne states baldly in the book what he mirthfully dramatises in the movie. Like, whatever happened to American ideals?

"They're kind of empty at the moment, just slogans. In the film I've tried to show that some of them can be thought of as somewhat real – tolerance of difference."

In the film's keynote song, "People Like Us", the amiably everyman character Louis Fyne sings, "*People like us/Gonna make it because/We don't want freedom/We don't want justice/We just want someone to love...*" Are most people so preoccupied with their immediate needs that they abdicate civic and democratic responsibilities?

"Mmm-hmm. People really do want more immediate gratification, and the song puts it kind of bluntly. I think it works in the song, but it would be difficult to admit that, that they'd prefer to have a comfortable sofa and an evening watching TV than freedom of the press or whatever."

Are those freedoms taken for granted?

"Yeah, I suppose so. People of my generation seem to be more concerned with their careers than anything else. It seems to be a little bit out of proportion. I think it must change eventually. That a whole generation of people would submit to being called 'yuppies' – I don't think they'd put up with that. I think they'd rather change their lifestyle than admit to being a yuppie. It sounds so horrible! Even if it's a comfortable life, it sounds such a derogatory term."

Everything "sounds", "seems", "if" with David Byrne, as if he's separated from reality by a hypothetical wall of contingency. Has he ever actually met anyone who admits to being a yuppie?

"No, ha ha, I don't think so. I know that I like of lot of the same things that yuppies are supposed to like. I might like a particular meal, then I'll read in the paper that it's a very 'yuppie' meal. I can't help it if it tastes good! What else? Oh yeah. I was working out of LA and I bought a used Volvo that was very cheap, and then I read that the Volvo is considered a very 'yuppie' car. So I felt, gosh, I'm treading on dangerous ground here!"

SINCE WORLD WAR II in North America, concentrations of capital spilled out along new federally subsidised highways, covered old countryside with a new suburbia and concentrated around interchanges. And there we find the profitable new malls...

Shopping had become the chief cultural activity in "our united states of shopping". Grady Clay, The New York Times Book Review, *1985*

IN *TRUE STORIES*, are you saying that today's American democracy now boils down to freedom of the consumer's choice?

"Ha ha!"

Do you celebrate shopping or condemn it?

"I think I'm celebrating, but exaggerating it to the point where it becomes amusing. But you're right: a lot of the responsibility part of democracy has been removed, and the licence part gets emphasised.

"Democracy is just a licence to manufacture or sell anything you please or dress however you want. Not that most people exercise it. It leads to a lot of kooks!"

"I started off reading old myths... the creation myth of the Navajo"

The farmer sketched out the extent of the Trilateral Commission control over the economy, the media, and education – they control, he said, either directly or indirectly, IBM, Kodak, the Chase Manhattan Bank, Exxon, Mobil, General Electric, the Bank Of America, Equitable Life, the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation, ITT, American Motors, Safeway, Time Inc, NBC, CBS, the New York Times, *the* Washington Post, *Pillsbury, General Foods, Coca-Cola, and many, many more...* Nicholas Lemann, Texas Monthly, *1978*

It's not what you know, it's who you know. Everybody believes in some conspiracy or other. The ones you believe in seem completely plausible. The ones you don't believe in seem like they were thought up by a bunch of nuts and kooks. Can one person be a conspiracy? Was supermarket barcoding prophesied in the Bible? David Byrne, True Stories

"THERE'S ONE MAN in particular who goes around talking to small communities, mainly the farmers and people who've been having a hard time of it lately. He convinces them that it's the Rockefellers and the Trilateral Commission who are at fault, who have caused the banks to hold onto their money. There's an element of truth in some of what he says. I personally don't believe the Trilateral Commission has a master plan – I don't think they're chummy enough!"

Are the prophets of Apocalypse still going strong?

"Stronger than ever. I think they have more than ever to point to now. To them it's very obvious that Aids is either the wrath of heaven or else a CIA experiment gone wrong. Religious television networks are full of people expecting the Apocalypse every day and pointing to the signs. And Reagan says he believes it as well, which is kind of terrifying. He sees world destruction as inevitable, and it's just a matter of waiting it out."

Slippery people

HAS IT BUGGED you when you've been accused of ethno-cultural tourism in your music?

"Yeah, it bugged me, but I couldn't defend myself really because it's true to some extent. I don't think there's anything wrong with it; it's just how well you do it. So that would be my own defence. There's nothing wrong with hybridising things, mixing them, stealing little bits and adding them to something else. If you do it well, it's alright. If you don't do it well, better leave it alone. When we got criticised, it was partly, I guess, that we weren't doing it good enough."

Partly also, he admits, that for some critics New York intellectuals by definition can't do anything right. But David Byrne can live with that attitude. Flipping the hybrid coin, how about Prince?

"I still like his records. In the States it's really difficult for a black performer to be accepted by whites on their own turf. The last one would have been Jimi Hendrix, and he wasn't quite as funky. Sadly there's a large number of black performers in the States who would like nothing better than to 'go white', to play Vegas and do soppy ballads... I'm generalising."

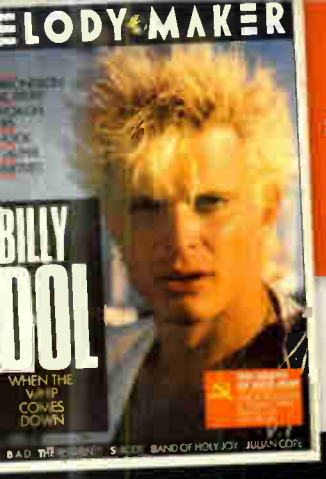
How much is the black tradition of "body music" to do with white stereotyping?

"That's true to some extent. But there is some sort of black culture that fosters a different attitude to dance. In black culture there's a lot more physical contact."

Is white culture getting more physical?

"Yeah, I think they've loosened up a little bit!"

And maybe the one-time uptight white culture-vulture is loosening up a bit too. The Jonathan Miller of pop? I think he's barely started. *Mat Snow* •



1986

OCTOBER – DECEMBER

PET SHOP BOYS, FELT, THE THE, MY BLOODY VALENTINE AND MORE

Experimenting with new lineups

NME NOV 8 Prince breaks up his most famous backing group.

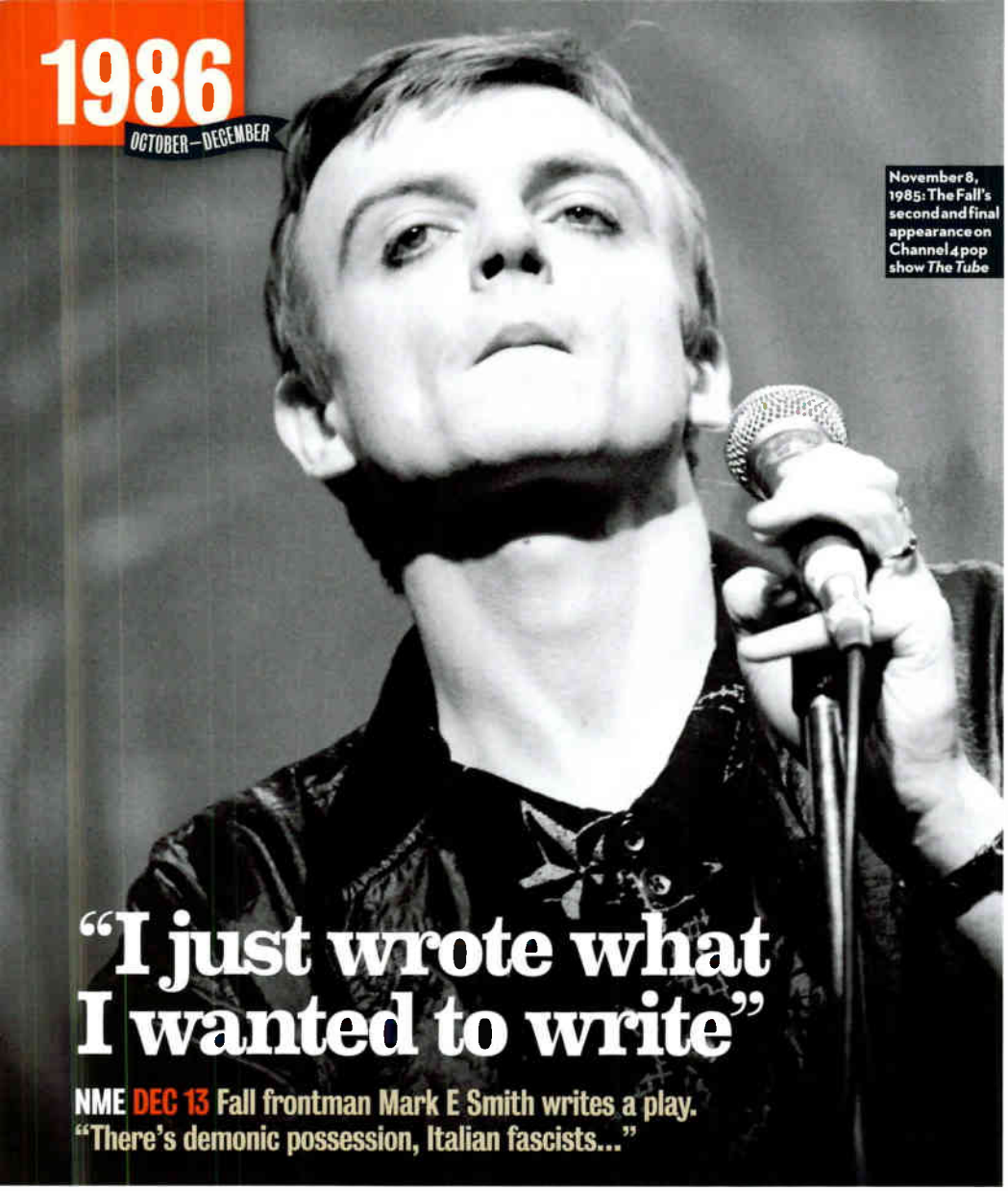
PRINCE HAS DISBANDED his backing group The Revolution, who have played with him for four years, and is currently putting together a Mark II version.

Hidden away at his Minneapolis headquarters, he is experimenting with new lineups, although it is rumoured that Maserati – who released a Prince-produced album on Paisley Park earlier this year – will provide the backbone of the group.

As for The Revolution, Bobby Z, who has been drumming for Prince for 10 years, will resume his production career, which started with an album by The Suburbs, produced under the pseudonym of Robert Brent. Guitarist Wendy Melvoin and keyboard player Lisa Coleman are planning an album together and are currently being courted by half-a-dozen record companies and several big-name producers. They are also poised to write a major film score, set for release in 1987.

GETTY

Prince on stage during the 1985 Purple Rain Tour, with opening act Sheila E and Revolution guitarist Wendy Melvoin



November 8, 1985: The Fall's second and final appearance on Channel 4 pop show *The Tube*

"I just wrote what I wanted to write"

NME DEC 13 Fall frontman Mark E Smith writes a play. "There's demonic possession, Italian fascists..."

WHAT CAUSED THE death of Luciani Albino, Pope John Paul I, after only 33 days on the papal throne in 1978?

Was he really a victim of the Vatican's inner sanctum, the dreaded P2 Masonic lodge, worried that the self-styled "Smiling Pope" was about to rid the church of its excess wealth and corruption? Did the strict Jesuit brethren, fearing that Luciani was about to give the OK to contraception, spike his cocoa with digitalis? Why was there never a post-mortem or a death certificate issued? And how does it all tie up with Italian banker Calvi, found swinging from a Waterloo underpass, and the Mafia's money-laundering system?

All these and many more questions will not necessarily be answered in *Hey! Luciani*, the first play from Mark E Smith, already proven to be one of Britain's sharpest and funniest writers with The Fall, and now embarking on a new format and presentation.

Some three months in preparation, and being revised and rewritten right up to its opening week, *Hey! Luciani* is initially scheduled for a two-week run at London's Riverside studios in Hammersmith.

"I got interested in Luciani after reading David Yallop's book *In God's Name* a while ago. "Hey! Luciani", the single, was written for the *Bend Sinister* LP and we thought it would be a good idea to do a full-scale Fall project around it – the subject matter appealed to our sense of humour. The first thought was to do it as the book did, but I just wrote what I wanted to write, the papal characters are in no way factual, it's not like they really were.

"I've taken liberties all over the place and the characters stimulated me on to other things," explains Smith.

From fragments of rumour and description, *Hey! Luciani* would appear to be an anti-polemical piece of dramatic intrigue, a musical thriller, a comedic conspiracy theory; all fertile settings for Smith's convoluted plotlines and maverick genius. Reluctance to stick to tried-and-trusted "fact" is only proper in the circumstances; the possibilities inherent in religious and big-business scandals are limitless and fantastic. Just like a Fall song, in fact.

"The play is a stimulation of the conspiracy theory in the book, the middle bit splits up into other things – South America and Britain, f'r'instance. No way is it a factual indictment of Catholicism or even the Vatican. People think when they hear it's about the pope that it must either be a "rock musical" or anti-religious statement or something. Which is a sad reflection on the way the theatre is viewed in this country. I chose the setting because the characters appealed to me and hopefully it makes good drama."

The play lasts about 100 minutes and features new Fall music themes for each character; "Haf Found Bormann" (for the all-girl Israeli commando group who appear as a mysterious but vital connection in the thickening plot), "Sleep Debt Snatches", which has a reggae atmosphere, a machine heart and spine cracking drumbeat, and "Informant" which, fittingly in view of posthumous revelations about the cheeseburger being a narc is "the Elvis Presley type number."

Apart from The Fall, there's Trevor Stewart as the pope, Lucy Burgess as the ballet dancer and pope's right-hand girl, Michael Clark has a brief role and Leigh Bowery, star of the excellent Smith-directed video for "Mr Pharmacist", is head of accounts at the Vatican. Why a play and not TV programme or video film for all this, Mark?

"I wanted to do something where the words could be heard on their own – there's a lot of bits where there's just going to be words on their own. I'm not in it a lot myself; I do a few numbers and the rest of the time is just narration and direction of others.

"It's more like a film than a play, because it's been severely edited. The thing I still have to get organised is getting people on and off stage. I've got one scene that is 10 seconds and the longest scene is a minute and a half. Certain people find that hard going, but I enjoy that. It keeps you on your toes."

A week before the play, Mark completely rewrote the third act – wasn't that a mite disconcerting for all the others?

"Not really, because before it had been a bit disconnected, they were saying, 'We can see what you're trying to do, but it needs something else.' With the new third act, it all fits; if you're sharp enough there's a real conspiracy to follow. There's demonic possession, Italian fascists, ex-Nazis, a Scottish communist..."

So, it's not been the haphazard rush job that rumour has made out?

"That's the impression I wanted to give. It's fucking great, actually, dynamic."

Does it compare with anything?

"It's like a cross between *The Prisoner* and Shakespeare. There's even pieces that rhyme and stuff – quite surprising, actually.

"It was our own idea, we financed it and we're not going to make any money off it, but it's a good little thing to do, alleviates the tedium."

"It's like a cross between *The Prisoner* and Shakespeare"

REX FEATURES

Cliff Burton: died in Sweden touring Metallica's Master Of Puppets

Thrown through window

MM OCT 11 Metallica's bassist is killed in a bus crash.

METALLICA BASSIST CLIFF Burton has been killed in a road accident. Burton was thrown through the window of the band's tour bus when it crashed en route from gigs in Stockholm to Copenhagen last Saturday (October 28). Drummer Lars Ulrich was also injured in the crash and "critical" in hospital for several days. He has since fully recovered. Another member of the road crew died in the accident.

Burton, who was 24, will be buried in his hometown of San Francisco.

"In a bad light"

NME OCT 18 Controversy surrounds the new Dead Kennedys album.

THE DEAD KENNEDYS have run into more trouble over their *Frankenchrist* album. The group has read reports that the Shriners, America's Masonic-style brotherhood, are suing them for $45 million over a photograph that appears on the cover of the LP, although they have yet to hear anything official. The reports say the Shriners are accusing the group of "holding them in a bad light".

Vocalist Jello Biafra said: "This stinks of petty harassment. America is the only country in the entire Western world where the laws are rigged in such a way that anyone would even think of filing a lawsuit as ludicrous as this one."

SHRINK RAP!

MICHAEL HUTCHENCE

MM OCT 4 Michael Hutchence from INXS is on the couch.

America

God, guns and guts made America. It's the only place that has whole neighbourhoods of fake 18th-century houses.

Haircuts

Never had one.

Alcohol

If you try as hard as possible to become an alcoholic and you get around that, you never will be in your life.

Sydney

Vegemite, Fosters, kangaroos, G'day mate, How y're doing, AC/DC. Home – someday I'll get there.

Heroes

I never know if I have any or not, but I guess, uh, Tony James, Marc Bolan, I won't say David Bowie because he knows it anyway, Gandhi and James Dean.

Villains

Jack Nicholson and Donald Sutherland – he has long grey hair. I saw him in a restaurant in Paris and he looked like he did in that movie where he stabbed people all the time. What was it called? Other villains – my old man and my brother, Rhett.

Automobiles

I love cars. Did you know the E-Type Jag was built around a cock 'n' balls? If you turn one upside down, that's the basic shape. I think a racing car's the best way to kill yourself. Paul Newman got it together. He's well into racing cars. That's the way to go. And he's always been married. Racing cars keep your marriage together.

Suicide

Fast cars into a wall, 400 miles an hour, or one Quaalude every hour until it stops.

Embarrassment

Falling over on stage at Red Rock before I'd even sung a note. Twice!

Fears

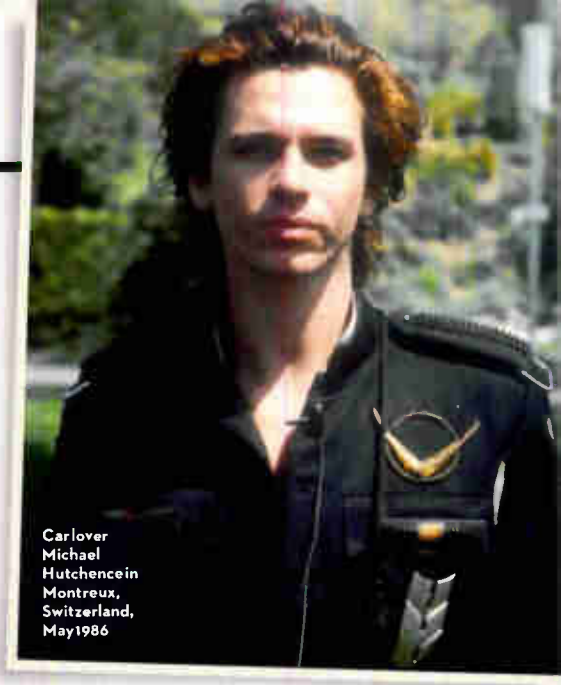
Don't have any.

Dreams

Do dreams come true? I don't know. I think they probably do, so make your dreams big.

Guns

Everybody has a fascination with guns, everybody wants to kill somebody. That's not the way to do it though. It's the easiest but it's not the most satisfying. I think, with a Magnum, it could be though – you can feel the kick. Clint Eastwood looks pretty satisfied.



Car lover Michael Hutchence in Montreux, Switzerland, May 1986

Ian Astbury

A great guy who convinced me to throw a door out of a 10-storey hotel, for which, in true English tradition, they charged me "80 ponds, sir" in the morning. That was in the Holiday Inn. I was showing him how small the bathrooms were and took off the bathroom door. We were outdoing one another all night. He's a man possessed. He also has a rather beautiful girlfriend.

Tomorrow

San Francisco. When we were there last, we went up to Bill Graham's place for this Indian curry – he even brought up the people from the restaurant with their own tandoori oven. His house is right up in the hills, surrounded by eucalyptus trees – it's like being in Australia – and his 10- or 11-years-old son was standing at this big telescope at the front window. We walked by and asked him what was down there and he said: "Look at all the poor people, I can see all the poor people from here!" That was a great lesson – never let your kid end up like that.

Aids

The plague of the '80s, that's the phrase, isn't it? It must be very scary for a lot of people right now. I hope friends of mine don't get it. It's weird to know some of them have an incredible chance of catching it and I don't. I've already been tested for it – for insurance. Maybe it's something to do with Reagan. Maybe it's the leftover from some chemical warfare tests. You never know what the fuck it is. Maybe the Russians tried dropping it on Haiti or something. It's such a *moral* disease.

John Wayne

A big, fat, bean-eating, beer-swilling, cancer-ridden asshole blowing people away from his country. He, to me, is the epitome of everything that's wrong with America.

KRASSNER / GETTY, ANDRE CSILLAG / REX FEATURES

My Bloody Valentine in 1986: (l-r) Dave Conway, Debbie Googe, Kevin Shields and Colm Ó Cíosóig

MIKE MORTON

"A much harder sound"

MM OCT 11 Introducing... My Bloody Valentine. "We seem to have a lot of bite."

AT LAST – the impending death of anorak... and here comes the fatal stab in the back. Just as we find this monotonous musical phase peaking, with the indie charts dominated by twee cherubs plying excruciatingly dull tributes to Pete Shelley's (rare) embarrassing moments, My Bloody Valentine have arrived to reclaim the young pop audience for punk 'n' roll.

And not a moment too soon. From the more dubious haunts of Dublin's fair city via some of the legendary sleazeholes of Europe, they have come to reside in London and are appalled by what they find. Groups being touted as the best of the indie scene, better suited plying their dull cabaret tunes in amateur talent evenings; a scene that has been ossified by the dominance of a clique of bands for whom the very precepts of rock'n'roll have the same effect as the scent of whisky to the Women's Temperance Movement.

Wimps, in other words – and if this turgid and terminally boring situation can be seen as a creeping disease, then My Bloody Valentine are the cure. Make no mistake about it – they plan to show these bands up for the drab, mediocre, middle-of-the-road wets they really are. My Bloody Valentine are rude and vulgar and noisy, and as if that's not enough, they write the best pop songs you've ever heard and perform with a fervour, with a challenging defiance, that these other bands just wouldn't understand.

"How can people get excited about bands like them. I mean, they're just so fucking dull, and they're clogging up the whole indie scene with their childish MOR crap," they moan disparagingly of their toothless competition.

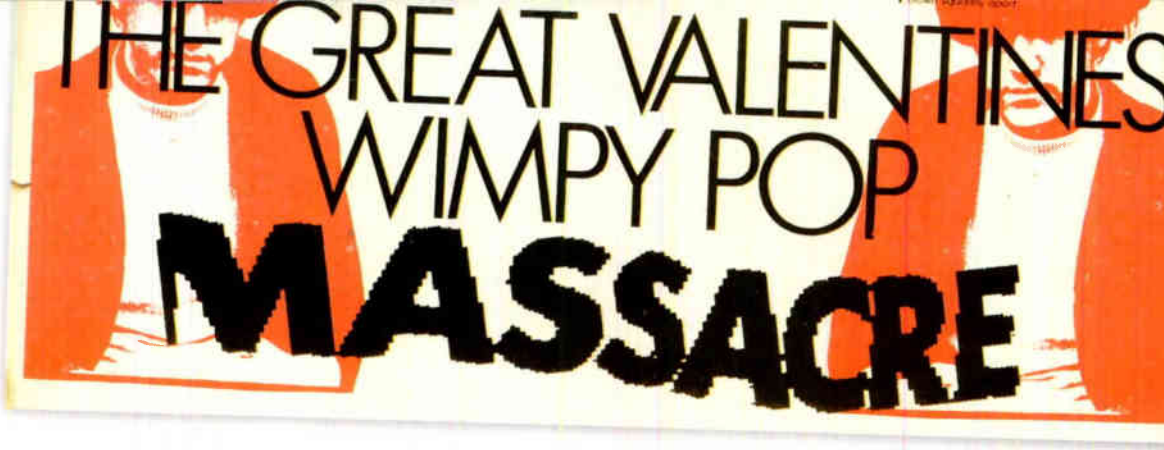
"People are just fooling themselves if they think the present indie scene is genuinely alternative to anything."

"People are fooling themselves if they think the indie scene is genuinely alternative"

My Bloody Valentine boast a sense of humour and they're no strangers to squalor, having exiled themselves from Ireland to spend a year bumming around the cheapest hostelries of Holland and Berlin, playing the seedier outposts and cruising with poverty before launching their attack on the British music scene. "We came to London to be rich and famous. We also knew it was the only place we could get the dole."

Singer Dave (who makes a practice of hurling his delicate frame at his audience), drummer Colm (the man with the maniacal grin) and guitarist/songwriter Kevin (who once harboured a crush on Susan Day) auditioned for a bass player, in the end finding Debbie, who is a girl.

"The first practice I went to, there were no songs," she remembers. "For the



first month of practising I felt sick every day 'cos I just wasn't used to the noise."

Debbie has now been in the band for a year and their songwriting, Kevin says, has improved. They write bright, noisy, catchy tunes full of melody, excitement and personality, exploding love songs with a lunatic energy that's a welcome antithesis to the feeble dithering of their supposed peers.

Imagine being a David Cassidy fan, then hearing the Ramones and suddenly realising what music ought to sound like. My Bloody Valentine should have the same effect on a young audience who are being steadily fed a diet of insipid nursery-rhyme music which hardly stimulates the keen libido.

Kevin: "What we're doing is a much harder sound than what young music fans are used to, but the content is there – it doesn't matter how abrasive the music is, if it's fun they're going to recognise it."

This is the kind of band that makes for diehard fans and, when you hear them, you'll suddenly realise what you've been missing – what you've been denied for the past few years – and defections from the spineless camp should come in droves... That's if people can still recognise what's good for them.

In appearance, the Valentines are purposely confusing. Debbie: "When people see the haircuts, they tend to assume we're wimpy and they always get quite a shock if they stay for the gig!"

Ah yes, haircuts, always a crucial factor.

Dave (indignantly): "We haven't got '60s haircuts. It annoys us when people say we have. Our haircuts are actually influenced by Down's Syndrome children's haircuts – I'm not sure exactly why, but a lot of retarded children have these kind of haircuts. I think our haircuts are very attractive; damn flattering, too."

Kevin succinctly describes their conscious deployment of camouflage: "In a sense, what we're doing with the image and the sound of the band is like throwing a blind around what we've got. The image is flat, we all look the same, the sound, the guitars are the same, but if people want to take it any *further*, then they have to look harder. The sound, the image of the band is totally superficial – it's fun, it's *fun* – but there are also qualities in our songs that really count for something."

Kevin spent some of his childhood in New York, he was once bitten by a shark and he cites *The Partridge Family* as having had a major influence on his life. Unlike most of our current songwriters, he is not obsessed with the sounds of the '60s – though MBV do ply the odd Monkees cover when the mood takes them. They like drinking, but not drugs. They have seen the seamy side of life: "We played to this heavy hardcore audience in Bremen once," Dave recalls with some nostalgia. "They'd been blasted with heavy hardcore all night and they thought they were, you know, dead punk – and then we came on!"

"They couldn't understand our sound for the first few minutes," says Kevin gleefully. "The fact that there was melody and noise – and then they went mental and we had to do three encores."

"We lived in squalor in Amsterdam for a while," Dave winces. "We were in a cheap hostel and they throw you out to walk the streets at 10 in the morning, so we spent a lot of time cruising around the post office watching the drug addicts and prostitutes... people with scabs all over. It's when they started to get friendly that we knew it was time to move on."

In Berlin, they released their first record, a mini-album, *This Is Your Bloody Valentine*, and, though an EP, "Geek", was released here on Fever Records in April, the band feel that their new EP, out this week, is far more representative of how they want to be.

"Basically, our sound relates to a primal experience that everybody has to go through"

The New Record By My Bloody Valentine is released on the new Kaleidoscope Sound label, run by Creation's black sheep Joe Foster. With a selection of four perfectly contoured and viciously attractive songs to choose from, it spotlights their direction and issues a direct challenge to the soggy bleatings of our currently touted indie heroes.

Colm: "We've changed a lot since the last single, and as far as band progression goes, well we've come a long way since then."

Kevin cites the main reason for their enthusiasm about this record: "The main thing for us is that this EP is coming out within a month of making it. It's exciting, it's fresh and it's exactly captured how we are as a band right now. A few of the songs were only written a month or so ago. It's a real document of what we are now."

This, surely, is the way records ought to happen.

Kevin: "We want it to always be like this, we hope this won't be a freak occurrence, having a record out while we still sound the way it is."

With song titles like "Destination Ecstasy" and "We're So Beautiful", their intent is an incitement to have fun.

Kevin: "'We're So Beautiful' will probably be misinterpreted.

Dave: "Oh, I don't know – I think it could be taken at face value, really!"

Reviewers still haven't pinpointed the Bloody Valentine sound – perhaps because they plunder all the best aspects of rowdy pop without reverentially exposing their roots. Kevin has spent hours listening to obscure '60s and '70s bands trying to find out where his inspiration come from.

Dave: "Basically, our sound just relates to a primal experience that everybody has to go through. Some people say our love songs actually sound a bit sick... in a Nabokov sort of way!"

Kevin: "Whenever we play with these bands who look to the Velvet Underground and all that stuff, we still seem a lot more subversive than that stuff, we still seem to have a lot of bite."

Kevin isn't old enough to remember the '60s, but he's been doing some research recently and concludes that "'60s music is much more attractive than '70s music – basically, if any band has something good about them that we like, then we'll take it right off them and do it better than them!"

My Bloody Valentine are raring to prove themselves against the current tide of mediocrity.

Dave: "I can't stand all these people who want to listen to five-year-old Orange Juice records – we don't have any regard or reverence for the people who are telling us that these drab indie bands are where it's at."

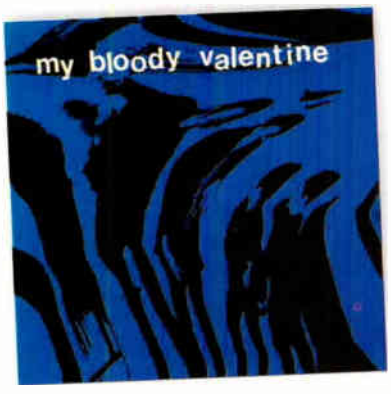
And anyone who's witnessed MBV live will certify that their claims are not just a load of hot air. Live, MBV perform with a manic intensity, fuelled partially by Colm's insane battering of his drumkit, partially by Dave's extraordinary PJ Proby contortions and, most of all, by the driving, spectacularly melodic brand of noise that confirms their ascendance as the perfect replacement for the tame elements that we've allowed to dominate our independent charts.

My Bloody Valentine are going to sweep all the wets before them and clear the slate for the kind of new music that we're too stupid to realise we really need.

"We'd like to rock a few boats," Dave admits, "but not in that pathetic Jesus And Mary Chain way. We just want to be the best band there's ever been. We know we're fucking brilliant, and we've only just started really."

My Bloody Valentine are the best new band in Britain. If you think The Smiths or The Shop Assistants are where it's at, you'll hate them. But be warned... your cosy little world is about to be blown squarely apart.

Helen Fitzgerald



Iggy: writing "his own elegy in the idiom of modern pop"

ALBUMS REVIEW 1986

ALBUMS

Iggy Pop Blah, Blah, Blah A&M

"I'm a real wild one" – Iggy Pop, 1986

Oh yeah? Blah, blah, blah!

"The only true performance," says Mick Jagger in *Performance*, "the only one that makes it all the way, is the one that achieves madness." That was 1969 and Jagger's performance was a premonition of his future, the isolated rock star aspiring to, but never achieving, blackness; the performer who lost his demon.

Three years later, Jagger was still sane after all these years and the freaky little beast had its claws deep in the backs of Pop and Bowie. Where the Stones had anticipated the destruction of the end of the '60s, Bowie and Pop were its products – runaway sons of nuclear A-bombs?

Well sure, it might sound naive, but to a receptive adolescent looking at the ripped and torn torso of Pop, and the translucent skin stretched tight over a flint skull, it was possible to believe his body might just break open right there from some internal fission.

After his derisory self-abuse, what was left when Pop faced the brink but the body itself? *Lust For Life* charted the progress from excess to the physical in exelcis, while the past of Pop leered from another hatchet face – *"A bit of fuckology/No fuuuuuuun."*

When destruction once more ended in death – Altamont echoed in a room in the Chelsea – the message was clear. Top yourself or get off the Pop! In his last masterful moment, Iggy Pop in *New Values*, aka Mick Jagger singing "Gimme Shelter", aka David Bowie's desperation on "Heroes", aka John Lydon on "Chant", bellowed the death of the old, even if the future looked as blank as the face in the mirror. "New Values" was the self-immolation of Pop, the key to the door that opens out into irrelevance, nothing comes my way indeed.

Here, now that the surrogate Pops of the interim have died their petty deaths (does anyone mourn for The Sisters Of Mercy?), now that David Bowie and Mick Jagger have reached the same level of the novelty superstar single, Iggy makes his return hooked up once more with Bowie – what is this, a rest home record for fallen heroes or a competition for the most redundant human being on the planet?

The result is precisely what you would expect. Adult Orientated Decadence – songs dedicated to sunglasses, lines like *"I'm a wild one"* and *"Death means nothing at all"* – and as an attempt to apply the compact disc aspirant methodology to the art of Pop (deceased) it's fine. Unlike the latterday Rolling Stones, it never sounds desperate, only sad. Iggy has taken his myth, derided it and written his own elegy in the idiom of modern pop – "Cry For Love" is the saddest song Madonna never sung.

Blah, Blah, Blah is halfway between *The Idiot* and "Material Girl". It's an LP dripping with irony, but I'm quite genuine when I say it's the best we can expect from Iggy today. *Don Watson, NME Oct 4*

The Edge Captive VIRGIN

Being the elevation of a celebrated Irish guitar player from a mere rock'n'roll vagabond to the *respectable* status of film score composer. It's an unspoken milestone, an invisible mark of

EBET ROBERTS / GETTY

growing up, as if by having your name to a film score is a barometer of maturity... you suddenly leave the civilian ranks of Bert Weedon and Hank B Marvin and instead become an officer and a gentleman, moving in the realms of John Barry and Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Well, if this is The Edge's coming of age, fair play to him – let him have the key to the door by all means – but don't misunderstand what you're getting here. It's *not* The Edge's solo album as such... it's a soundtrack of incidental music for a film, and like most incidental music of any sort, it's as dreary as stale yoghurt out of context. Don't be enticed by the prospect of a whole album of searing guitar work executed so majestically with U2; here it's all breathy atmospherics and bland orchestrations, and occasionally ("One Foot In Heaven") it offers an alarming resemblance to *Tubular Bells*.

It's possibly unfair to pass judgement on the music without having seen the movie – "a tale of survival and renewal... a suspense story, by turns violent, erotic and funny" – but it's hard also not to feel some sense of disappointment that a musician of The Edge's vision and depth hasn't been confident enough to break the mould a little bit and use the visual imagery to more original effect.

It's surprising, too, that given U2's flirtations with the roots of Irish music, he hasn't explored this area to greater effect. It's unthinkable that the music here – largely mellow and soporific – could stimulate any feelings that might be violent, erotic or funny.

The one exceptional track is, of course, the single, "Heroine", the only non-instrumental in the pack, featuring the sublime singing of Sinead O'Connor, and the song itself wielding a haunting mesmeric quality over an ethereal volley of strings. The Edge's own distant jangling ties the loose ends perfectly and the whole thing meets with gloriously understated tension.

It should be a hit, and if it is then it should inspire interest in the album and the film. But I can't honestly get excited about the film, having listened to the music. And I can't imagine that seeing the film, however good it may be, will send people running out of the cinema to the record shops.

Perhaps this sort of thing is best left to Mark Knopfler and his cronies. *Colin Irwin*

Side One: FELT
FOREVER BREATHES THE LONELY WORD.
1. RAIN OF CRYSTAL SPIRES 3.54.
2. DOWN [illegible] OUT. 3.38.
3. SEPTEMBER LADY. 3.43.
4. GREY STREETS. 3.45.
SONGS WRITTEN BY LAWRENCE AND PUBLISHED BY COMPLETE MUSIC.
PRODUCED BY JOHN A. RIVERS.
A CREATION ARTEFACT.
CRE LP 011. 33 RPM STEREO. ℗ 1986 CREATION RECORDS.
© 1986 COMPLETE MUSIC LTD.

Felt Forever Breathes The Lonely Word CREATION

The thing I like best about Lawrence of Felt is that not only is he not afraid to wear his influence on his records – he insists upon it and revels in them throughout. Round about now, Lawrence is having a Lou Reed phase. You know that by the tone of the vocals and their mannerisms, by the feel and flow and atmosphere of the songs, by the cheerlessness of the lyrics.

Any exploration of the poetic imagery, the religious reference, will reveal quite clearly that Lawrence is not a particularly contented type of person. At times, he appears positively tragic – "*I'm not your Jesus, so will you get off my cross/You ruined it all*" ("A Wave Crashed On Rocks"). And you need look no further than the title to get the gist of "All The People I Like Are Those That Are Dead".

The music, however, refuses to brood. I wouldn't necessarily endorse this as the "whole LP of concise pop songs" which was promised by Felt, but there is indeed a light-handed vitality to be found in the guitar playing, in the delightfully old-fashioned pipings of the organ and electric piano.

The thing I like second best about Lawrence from Felt is that not only is he not afraid to sound blatantly like Lou Reed – he gets away with it too, because Felt are also Felt, and there's enough of Felt in here to rescue what might otherwise have seemed like a joke that went on just that little bit too long... *Carol Clerk*

The Housemartins: best of all the wets?

SINGLES

My Bloody Valentine New Record By My Bloody Valentine KALEIDOSCOPE SOUND

Alright, let's make it official: this is where anorak ends and it couldn't be booted into past tense by a better record. Four brilliant slabs of romantic pop noise on an EP so brimming with vitality and action that its undiluted and joyful revelling in fun, fun, fun will show up the spineless anorak crew for the boring wimps they are.

"Lovelee Sweet Darlene" is a new pop classic; so simple, so soppy, so loud with everything you've ever wanted all on one record – racing melodies, deadpan harmony, manic drumming and (and let's not forget how important this ingredient can be) a sense of humour.

"We're So Beautiful" just might be tongue-in-cheek, and "Another Rainy Saturday" comes as living proof that My Bloody Valentine have stockpiled the best collection of new songs you've ever heard.

This is more than teenage fantasy – this is the start of something new and it hasn't arrived a minute too soon. This band are going to be huge – remember where you read it first. *MM, Oct 4*

World Party Private Revolution CHRYSALIS

The first solo single from ex-Waterboy Karl Wallinger, whose ecology-minded philosophies are encapsulated in a song from his great new LP, with funky overtones and a strong pop melody couching his instructive wisdoms. A smasher. *MM Oct 4*

The Housemartins Think For A Minute GO! DISCS

A re-recording of one of the best album tracks, stripped bare and distinguished by beautiful high-pitched balladic vocals and a luscious trumpet that caresses the whole song perfectly... Of all the wets, The Housemartins are probably close to being the best. Top pop stars or total willie noses? Only time will tell. *MM Oct 4*

The Shop Assistants I Don't Want To Be Friends With You ROUGH TRADE

This is where anorakism peaks – from here it has to be downhill all the way. How we've put up with this rubbish for so long is one of those strange phenomena that strikes the music business every now and then. Twee beyond the reaches of belief, let's bring a bit of balls back into this whole sorry indie business. And let's do it NOW. *MM Oct 4*

Squirrel Bait Kid Dynamite HOMESTEAD

Last year's debut by Squirrel Bait (from Louisville, Kentucky, Muhammad Ali's hometown) left Hüsker Düde Bob Mould muttering "'bout the finest record in the entire universe". "Kid Dynamite"/"Slake Train Coming" (HMS061) finds the teenage upstarts taking more than just praise from HD (power over volume, any day) and proves that old Blob knows a decent racket when it sandblasts his ears. *NME Nov 1*

YOURI LENQUETTE / REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

"The best times, the worst times"

For the new THE THE album, Matt Johnson has taken a dramatic personal journey. Politics, sex, religion, and filming in South America have all created the mighty *Infected*. "The power and beauty of music is that it lets you have your own fantasies," he says.

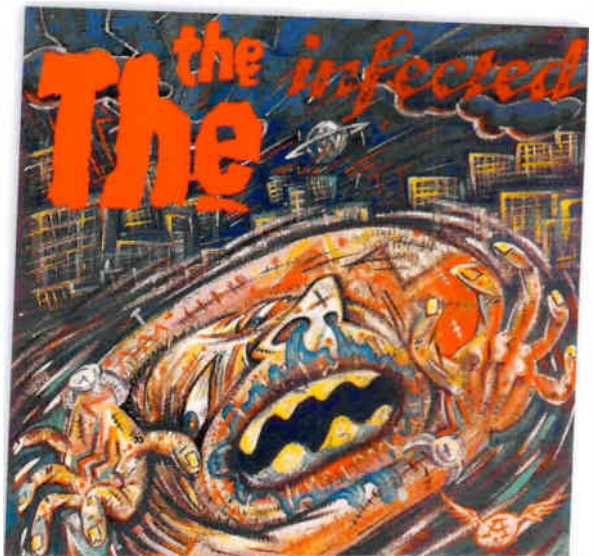
— NME DECEMBER 13 —

IT WAS DIFFICULT to believe at first. Matt Johnson had kept the world and his record company waiting three years for a sequel to the revered *Soul Mining*, and now he was telling us that the record's release depended entirely on an epic video shoot that would take in extravagant locations from Bolivia to Peru to New York

Publicly the project was greeted with the hooted derision normally reserved for the government's pained attempts to explain another round of party bottom-spanking, Hitler impersonations and spies in red underpants.

Having already furnished Johnson with a home studio and enough cash to see him through two traumatic years of procrastination and artistic inertia, could CBS really be expected to dish out another £350,000 for this wild adventure? The fact that his manager, Stevo, was losing money hand over fist through his other artists on Some Bizzare, forcing him to sell his home and move into the office, hardly gave the project substance either.

Laughing, perhaps, in the face of defeat, Stevo had also taken to dressing like the court jester. Would you give money to a man wearing felt boots with silver toecaps and a coat made from assorted deckchairs? CBS did. »



"I ended up becoming the song": The The's Matt Johnson turns his chest into a canvas for *Infected* cover artist Andy Dog, his brother

Taking into account the costs of the LP, Johnson committed himself to a half-million-pound debt and set about realising a personal dream that would leave him with a pocketful of priceless visions and footage that blurred fantasy with reality to unsettling effect.

Video makers Peter Christopherson, Tim Pope and Alastair McIlwain were recruited as well as movie director (*Static*) Mark Romanek. After months of rumour and speculation, abandoned locations and Some Bizzare hype, it was announced that a series of videos had been made reflecting the eight songs from the *Infected* LP.

On the evening of the premiere at the Electric Cinema on West London's Portobello Road, we waited patiently for the heavyweight CBS executives to turn up, no doubt anxious to know why they had helped fund an expedition to a part of South America best known in the music business for the quality of its cocaine.

Johnson, ditching his customary jeans and leather jacket, was dressed in homburg and overcoat like a young Tom Waits, maybe in deference to one of his inspirations, who might have worked on the *Infected* LP had other commitments not prevented him. He looked pale and nervous, taking furtive swigs from a small bottle of vodka inside his coat. His family, pub landlords from the East End, made jokes in the back row. Still we waited...

The CBS execs arrived like the mafia filing into a New York court room. Great big men marching silently in a line, one in a seersucker jacket, another in the kind of loud check trousers beloved by those who consider the ultimate pleasures to be business and golf, preferably both at the same time. They seemed to keep coming for ages, and it dawns that these days Matt Johnson is no longer the bedsit boy wonder but white-hot property.

"I'm going to circle the world on the wing of a jet." A neon glowing text trickles across the screen to the eerie babble of shortwave radio. The roar of "Infected" introduces itself with ear-busting volume. Turning around, I see the men at the top clutching their heads in pain. They look like they just heard The Boss had been killed in a plane crash.

"I wanted them to pay attention," comments Stevo later, blood in his ears and bells on his feet.

At the end of the screening everybody seemed stunned. There was a long pause before the audience broke into applause. You could really only recall fragments from the dense collage that had gone before. Tim Pope's brilliantly simple approach on "Slow Train To Dawn" with its classically filmed images, the thrashes of a dying fish in Mark Romanek's "Sweet Bird Of Truth", Alastair McIlwain's haunting animation for "Angels Of Deception", and the rambling humour, energy and claustrophobia of Peter Christoperson's rush through South America in "Infected" and "The Mercy Beat".

A second look confirms that the videos are certainly a welcome departure from the typical MTV bubblegum that America so eagerly shoots up in stupefying great doses, and the more ambiguous amongst them will probably stand up to repeated viewing.

Nobody can claim they represent a coherent whole, however, and the links, snatches of lyric and handheld Super 8 footage are more pauses than narrative explanation.

But the quality of the work aside, these videos raise an inevitable question. Why have a single image dictated to you when your own imagination is capable of generating hundreds? In retrospect, I realise that by seeing the videos first, my feelings towards the LP were badly prejudiced. Matt Johnson was rubbing our noses in the world's misdemeanours and expecting us to be grateful for the experience. And really, this stuff smelt bad. You gagged. Some of the images, especially of women, seemed malevolently cruel. Other scenes were so choked with religious imagery, it was like being locked in a tacky Catholic shrine.

I decided it was a record of unnecessary pessimism, but I was wrong. There's an extraordinary defiant optimism in *Infected* that helps make it one of the most exciting records this year. The real big bang!

One has to ask, did it need a video at all?

MATT JOHNSON USUALLY does what he wants and gets what he wants. If CBS or a devil of his own making get in his way, he'll slug out on the ropes just like his grandfather did in the boxing ring. One of his biggest heroes is Marvin Hagler, "because he achieved everything he wanted to".

Though he's been involved in music for 10 years now, he's only made three LPs. *Burning Blue Soul* in his late teens, *Soul Mining* in his early twenties and now, at 25, *Infected* – all testimony to a personal maxim that you should only work when the inspiration takes you.

When CBS refused to release "Sweet Bird Of Truth", his comment on America's involvement in the Middle East, in the wake of the Libyan crisis, he forced it out as a limited edition. Knowing that they were likely to cause controversy in the current climate, he then chose two more singles from the LP, "Heartland" and "Infected", which were both banned by the BBC.

I'm not surprised he drinks a lot of vodka and pumps a lot of iron. Sometimes he does both together, which is a new one on me. My timing's good the day I visit his North London flat – it's strictly vodka only.

First, I ask why make the videos with all their negative connotations when the LP was his most powerful record yet. It's something he's obviously thought about.

"I've made mistakes in those videos and things that I would change now... The problem is, you tie your images down, you're being so specific. Also, when I'm working with other people, other directors, I'm compromising my ideas. If you've seen the video before the record, you're going to have those images with you... The power of music and the beauty of music is that it lets you have your own fantasies.

"But I don't regret making them. I came to a crossroads in my career, really. Having not played live for three-and-a-half years and having such a low profile – for instance, not having my picture on my sleeves, I decided to raise the whole stakes of the thing and risk becoming known a lot more as a personality, which is not really something I'm keen on. I don't want to push my personality, although that is a bit of a contradiction.

"Also, I'm the first person to have done anything like this. You've had video albums which are live, or greatest-hits compilations, but to

Johnson in the video for "Sweet Bird Of Truth", which CBS initially vetoed as a single

approach something like this... I do consider video to be a relevant art form, and the people I chose to work with, like Tim and Peter, were people that work with me rather than for the record company."

We agree that the video for "Mercy Beat", shot in Peru and Bolivia, is the most successful. Like those for "Heartland" and "Infected", it was based on his own ideas interpreted by Peter Christopherson.

Essentially, the song echoes the themes of the album: loss of innocence, the schizophrenia that lies between temptation and salvation, and Matt Johnson's final solution – blind faith.

Its basic scenario: a top-hatted dwarf (there's just about mileage left in the seminal menacing midget) offers drugs and magic (a llama foetus), the whisky priest proffers liquor and redemption to go, and the Indians, a soul-cleansing voyage up the Amazon.

It's very funny in places and packed with portentous reference points – TS Eliot's *Wasteland*, Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, Graham Greene's *The Power And The Glory* and even a dash of Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*. And you thought *Fitzcarraldo* was top heavy.

"Essentially, it's about spiritual salvation, which is why I wanted to do it in South America, because of the heavy influence of Catholicism and Americana. This bizarre pot pourri of cultures and religious ideas and politics. It's like all these forces vying for your soul.

"At the end, there's a red bulb swinging and all these images, slogans, advertising boards, vultures, dead meat, soldiers, flags... It really summed up the place we were in and lent itself to the song."

Real life was never far away from the plot. Having Indians as benign guides proved to be a fortuitous piece of typecasting.

"They really got into the spirit of things," Matt recalls with a manic glint in his eyes.

"They were all on hallucinogenics. The guy you see with the tin hat and a bicycle pump was the witchdoctor, their leader. They were great blokes," he adds gleefully, though what this adds to anthropological knowledge I'm not sure. "So wild! I'd like to take them to a London club somewhere. Good dancers, too.

"When we did that shot on the bandstand in Iquitos, a communist rally came marching through. They wanted to burn down the houses of the rich people. Then they started shouting at us – 'Gringos, the exploiters!' The Indians stood around us and protected us.

"I was trying to hurl Stevo out into the crowd to film them. He's going, 'Get off, leave me alone.' Then the generator went dead and all the lights went out. Everybody was terrified. The communists' leader managed to climb onto the bandstand. He was screaming, going mad. But two of the crew managed to hurl him off.

"Although I don't think we really captured what went on down there, I think you can see it's not just performance. I virtually lived that song while I was there. I had some of the best times and the worst times of my life there. I ended up becoming the song."

THE OTHER VIDEO which stands out from the rest is for "Heartland", again a Johnson-Christopherson collaboration. It's the only one in which he performs as a singer, playing out the '50s rock dream against a background of Britain in decay. It's really asking us who the hell we think we are in 1986."

Reminiscent in technique to "This Is The Day", the song's tension springs from the contrast between a classic pop melody and some very bitter lyrics. The video just about does it justice, resisting the temptation of monochrome Brit realism even if it does employ some stock images of American cultural imperialism.

"I was pleased that one worked out well, because that's possibly the best song I've ever written," he says deadpan. "I'm attacking those working-class Tories and middle class who still think that Britain is on a par economically with France and Germany, when really we're like Portugal. We're a poor country.

"And also, this vile idea that our health service and police force are the envy of the world. They're the laughing stock of the world! Falling into an obscene state of disrepair.

> "I've lived out the lives of the characters. I call it method songwriting"

"I wanted to write a classic song which is basically representative of its time, a record that in 1999 people will put on and it will remind them exactly of this period of time... You know it took 18 months to write on and off, because I knew it was the most important song I was writing."

It's unlikely that the kind of person who would buy a Matt Johnson record is going to be offended by his portrayal of the west as the corruptor of souls. In the shadows of Aids and nuclear holocaust, his heavy use of biblical and disease imagery would also, one suspects, be deemed entirely appropriate. But what of the images he chooses for women?

To put it mildly, they're Babylonian. Women as temptresses, whores and she-devils. The line from "Out Of The Blue (Into The Fire)" that runs "*She was lying on her back with her lips parted / Squealing like a stuffed pig*" is strong enough in itself, but when it's underlined by another negative image in Tim Pope's video of a prostitute thrashing around on a brothel bed as Matt Johnson suffers another dose of the existential blues, you begin to wonder.

Only Neneh Cherry is allowed to preserve any sense of female dignity, and that in itself is some feat considering she appears in another Pope video ("Slow Train To Dawn") tied down with her legs open on railway tracks as Johnson thunders towards her on a steam train.

"I can see why it might shock some people," he concedes, "especially as I'm supposed to be a person who's fairly sensitive and stuff. But I was trying to display the weakness of men. I was trying to put across the traditional macho viewpoint of which I am prey to as much as anyone else."

I mention Picasso's infamous remark that all women are either goddesses or whores.

"Well, men do perceive them like that. I mean, I disgust myself the way that I think a lot of the time. I am chauvinistic a lot of the time, and that is part of that struggle. I'm aware it's bad and wrong. But I believe you have to live through these things to understand them; so many people have these attitudes, but they're not based on any experience.

"That track was autobiographical. I get myself into a lot of difficult situations. I feel I have to live out what I write about. I don't feel it's fair if I've never done the things I'm singing about. So, I've done everything. I've lived out the lives of the characters. It's something I call method songwriting."

He laughs for a moment, realising how people might take this as pretentious, but the reminder of all those she-devils has rattled him. He insists on making one more stab at an explanation.

"I stand by those images I've used, because I think they were necessary to get across the disgustingness of it – the kinds of things men do to women... I really love women's company, they're stronger than men. I think females are the saving grace of the human race."

Not a bad defence, even though he still seemed disturbed. You can use sexual exploitation like violence in an artistic context to make a statement, but after so much repetition it crosses that invisible line from meaning into cheap thrills and degradation. It's really something you have to make your own mind up on.

Yet it seems more than coincidence that Matt Johnson's final comment on the videos is that "they're all hard hitting. They don't leave enough room so there's no real dynamic. You can be numbed by too many images."

Which leads neatly to his next project, a feature-length film to be conceived as the music is written.

"Video has always been an afterthought to the music. And, conversely, with film you put a soundtrack on after shooting. So what I want to do when I'm writing and demoing, I'll work with whichever director I choose to work with. The music and film will be equal partners. I want to experiment with time, space, colour, silence. The trouble with video is you're trying to get so much information in a short space of time."

At this stage, he can afford to be vague.

"I really don't know what it's going to be about. This one has been quite cathartic for me. Maybe the next one will be all flowers and love and being nice to girls!" *Ian Pye* •

"The last of the 1980s synth duos"

How has a former pop writer become a pop star and kept his sanity? Neil Tennant calmly explains the media landscape, and – horrifyingly – what the name PET SHOP BOYS really means. "We don't want it to be the authentic rock experience," he says.

— NME DEC 20 —

HIS BEDSIDE MANNER could calm even the most frightened of rodents. Relaxed, open, gently self-deprecating, it encourages the tensed-up joints to soften and sag beneath their thin covering of flesh and baby fur. And the voice, with its blend of north-east burr and cultured, media-world ennui, its hypnotic emphasis on one or two key words in each sentence, soothes the nerves still further.

The little pink eyes open wider in trust, the little pink paws flex and point, then fall into repose. There can be no threat here... he's almost sweet enough to be Saint Francis Of Assisi. It's true. A hamster can rest easy when Neil Tennant's around.

The man beside me on the beige Dralon couch in this disused office at EMI's London headquarters seems an unlikely target for sexual speculation and controversy, be its nature animal, vegetable, mineral or whatever. Expensively but anonymously dressed, hair greying at the temple and thinning at the crown, friendly and unfailingly well-mannered, he doesn't even make a very convincing pop star.

But as the more high-profile half of the Pet Shop Boys (and what a health warning that name should carry, the cognoscenti will gleefully tell you), Neil Tennant finds himself both these things. He's obviously an astute and highly intelligent man, so mustn't the former be something deliberately contrived and encouraged to help engineer the latter? In anticipation of denials-a-go-go, let's marshal the evidence... »

pet shop boys

please

CHRIS VAN DE VOOREN / SUNSHINE / REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

"I think we are pretentious and contrived": Pet Shop Boys Chris Lowe (left) and Neil Tennant

July 5, 1986: the Pet Shop Boys perform "West End Girls" and "Tonight Is Forever" on *The Euro Tube*

OF MICE AND MEN

Firstly, there's that name. "Something to do with putting hamsters up your bum," he's conceded under duress in previous interviews. Well, until the reality was spelt out to me recently, it had been a case of conjuring up the worst possible interpretation and then doubling it – and even then I'd fallen woefully short. But I digress.

And then there's the studied ambiguity of just about everything else: the sullen insouciance of Neil and partner Chris Lowe as they stare out from LP sleeve or poster, from TV screen or video; the homoerotic possibilities of much of the material on their album *Please*; the steady refusal to rise to the bait of journalists on their "Are they lovers?" quest. We could go on.

"We've never said anything about our sex lives to the newspapers or to magazines, and we don't intend to," says Neil. "And that's not a clever ploy to appear mysterious – although if it has that effect I don't mind.

"I've always been a very private, even secretive person, and Chris is as well... I find it weird talking about it all. Obviously, people are going to look at our songs and read this or that into them, but the end result of people just speculating about things is far more accurate than them thinking one thing or another."

How more accurate?

"Because they think hazy things about you, and maybe things are hazy, you know what I mean? I just don't know why people want to bracket you in one way or another. It's not what I want."

Ah-ha. But if that's true, haven't the Pet Shop Boys only themselves to blame by sailing so close to the wind, exploiting the commercial cachet of their ambiguity without answering the questions that it inevitably raises? After all, groups like The Communards and Bronski Beat have proved, thankfully, that being open about your homosexuality needn't harm your marketability – in Britain at least, if not in the more homophobic US. So, isn't all the "Are They? Aren't They?" preoccupation just the hoped-for reaction to a calculated sales ploy?

Neil maintains not, opening his defence by stressing again the innocent manner in which the group's name was chosen.

"Chris had these friends who worked in a pet shop and who were known as the Pet Shop Boys, so when we needed a name... I was quite horrified when I found out what it means. Then we thought, 'Who cares what people think?' I think it's quite good in a way if people think that."

He then moves on to a more general exposition of the British star system: "If you decide you want to be a star, you have to be prepared to share your private life with the public... However, if you decide you don't want to be seen as a star there's loads of things you don't do. You don't do lots of interviews, you don't do lots of cosmetic photo shoots for *My Guy* or whatever. You don't do glamorous videos, and you definitely don't talk about your own life."

He sees it as a simple equation, almost a fair one. The bottom line is that if you court the papers for good publicity, you have to accept the inevitability that one day the pendulum will swing back at you and you'll get bad publicity. We can all fill in our own examples.

"It goes back to the do's and don'ts of being a pop star," he says, shifting on the sofa. "You bring it upon yourself if you play that game, being in the tabloids, being super-sexy soaraway George Michael, and the downside is that there'll be people offering £30,000 for some scuzzy story on you. If you haven't had the upside, you're less likely to get the downside...

"The Fleet Street papers have a cast of characters – it's Britain as a soap opera. You're either in the series or you're not, and we're not really in it, you know? There's Wicksie, Dirty Den, George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley, Sam Fox I suppose is the ultimate example... even people who aren't that successful any more. People who were a member of the cast can always make a reappearance."

HE'S RIGHT, OF course. In tabloid times like these, when the characters created by stylist and strategists in PR companies and ad agencies can oust the real world from the front pages, courting the media has to be a conscious decision. Neil draws a parallel between Rod Stewart, who gets press out of all proportion to his record sales, and Mark Knopfler, who sells millions with Dire Straits but chooses to avoid the popular press.

"It proves people can still like your records without knowing everything about you. Being in the papers all the time, the ups and downs of it all, can actually put people off, I'm sure. I'd rather be a kind of Kate Bush, you know, who comes up with a really good record every three years or so that sounds like no one else and may or may not be popular."

That kind of attitude to privacy and career longevity is fine on a personal level – in many ways it seems the only sensible policy for personal and public survival. But someone like Jimmy Somerville would surely argue that a pop performer is in a unique position to reassure young people who may be facing crises of sexual identity by providing them with a role model – even a hazy one.

"But at the end of the day that comes down to the kind of person Jimmy Somerville is, you know," Neil maintains, "and I quite admire him for it. But it does reflect the kind of person he is, and this reflects the kind of person I am."

He smiles a kind of "so that's that then" smile and scratches an eyebrow. It's odd the way the world works – if he's not thinking it, I am. If we turned the clock back two years it would be Neil Tennant, *Smash Hits* journalist, a man whose private life could stay private and unquestioned, quizzing some other star about their modus

ITV / REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

operandi. Now here he is, former London editor for Marvel Comics, former mastermind behind the best-selling book of the '80s, *The Dairy Book Of Home Management* (just £1.95 from your milkman, plus three bottle tops), fielding the questions.

He acknowledges the strangeness of the situation, and admits that his major legacy from an earlier career as a pop hack is a general self-consciousness about the role thrust upon him by success. The contrast between the two states is something that intrigued him long before it came to have a personal application.

"I was always fascinated by this idea that one day people are on the dole and the next they're swanning around in a limousine. It seemed particularly relevant to the kind of music *Smash Hits* was dealing with. So you'd ask famous people if they ever did normal things. You'd ask Simon Le Bon if he ever did the washing-up or the hoovering and so on... then you actually have success and you find you do still do the hoovering."

> "You bring it upon yourself if you play that game, being in the tabloids"

Stardom, it seems, is as much an attitude of mind as anything else. Neil quotes the example of a recent German TV extravaganza on which the Pet Shop Boys shared guest honours with half the British and American charts. He and Chris stood at Number Two in the Deutsch hit parade and arrived on set alone, carrying their own suitcases. Other artists like Billy Idol, despite being without a current hit, turned up in full star regalia with their own entourages. You can walk down the road unrecognised and unmolested if you want to and if you go the right way about it, he would argue.

Because of his experience as a pop scribe, much has been made of Neil's ability to engineer the duo's success through referral to other case histories. It's a theory he dismisses, saying the Pet Shop Boy approach to pop was sparked by the interplay between his own post-punk, singer-songwriter-ish aspirations and Chris' interest in dance and music and disco. The mutant child of their twin enthusiasms was almost aborted the day they heard New Order's "Blue Monday".

"I thought, 'Damn, this is what we're supposed to sound like.' I thought we might as well give up then. I thought we'd missed the boat."

The steamer was yet to sail, though, as we now know. After false starts and contractual hassles, "West End Girls" emerged as one of the most unique pop debuts of the decade so far, establishing a sound that synthesised influences left, right and centre into one detached and ironic whole, scornfully topping charts the world over.

But then, given that he also had the skill, luck and application to create hit records, Neil Tennant was certainly blessed with the correct pop sensibility to sell millions of records. Given the encouragement, he'll tell you that *Dusty In Memphis* is his favourite, most brilliant album ever, will analyse Abba's Bergmanesque period of après-divorce angst, and will say this about Madonna's "Into The Groove": "When she sings, *'Only when I'm dancing can I feel this free...'*, that to me is almost a profound statement, although a lot of people would think it's just a banal disco record.

"It touches your emotions without referring back to other records. It's not about sounding like The Velvet Underground or the Buzzcocks – all of that's irrelevant. It's about feelings and physical sensations. It's about feeling happy, unhappy, in love, out of love."

I know what he means. But then that kind of personal response to the commonplace can never really be measured – someone, somewhere is bound to find your record meaningful, no matter how uninspired it sounds to everyone else. And a not uncommon charge against the Pet Shop Boys is that their music is essentially cold, a clever pastiche of other moods and styles that never really engages the emotions. Are any of the songs on *Please* written from the heart?

"A lot of them," says Neil, shifting position again. "Almost all of them. Many of them are about running away... They're about someone brought up in a middle-class background in Newcastle, who doesn't want to have a normal job, who doesn't want to get pinned down to bourgeois values, even though he could do that quite successfully and quite easily."

Universal emotions, then, even if Neil does recall them within the specifics of North Gosforth, Gateshead and the Haymarket bus station in Newcastle. A second recurrent theme, stated most forcibly in the song "Suburbia", is that of the boredom, frustration and petty cruelties associated with the average British street.

"To me there's something very poignant about the English suburban street," he says, almost wistfully. "The bored kids, the people waiting for a bus, the way nothing's like it was... I think I have almost a morbid fascination with that kind of thing. It's unhealthy, but I definitely have it. The boredom and the excitement. I find it romantic and interesting...

"But then, to me, suburban streets are also frightening. When I lived in Newcastle in the early '70s, the skinhead thing was very strong... You'd be waiting for the last bus home and there'd be all these skinheads about. It was terrifying. For years, I was scared of the dark, scared of walking down the streets at night.

"I've completely got over it now – I can even do it in New York. But I always feel the threat of violence on English streets, to be honest, because it's there, I think."

THIS FAR INTO a career launch, it would seem not unreasonable to wonder when these disparate Pet Shop Boy preoccupations (flight, fancy and urban paranoia, perhaps?) are going to be translated into live performance. After all, the luxury packaging that swathed review copies of *Please* way back in March promised an "extravagant stage presentation" before the end of this year, and yet December is about to blow out without even a hint of a microphone and two guitars in some crummy club. Could there be a problem here?

Neil says not. In fact, the carrot of those glamorous nights in red plush theatres was just one of those self-fulfilling prophesies that snowball along without ever self-fulfilling. Journalists kept asking if there were plans to tour. The Pet Shop Boys kept saying yes. Journalists then asked when, where and what like, and the Pet Shop Boys started coming up with bigger and better plans until even EMI believed them. Then they noticed the professed tour was just a month away and no real preparations had been made.

Now plans are advanced for the second half of next year, when Neil and Chris will star in what amounts to their very own "production", designed and directed (gulp) by luminaries from the English National Opera. Pretension, contrivance and a total lack of spontaneity will be the order of each evening, we are promised. Given the nature of the Pet Shop Boys' art and their extremely limited experience of live work (some 55 minutes spread over three venues, two years and two continents), it should be the ideal setting.

"We don't want it to be the authentic rock experience, with sax players, a horn section, three black backing singers, a bass player and a brilliant session drummer. It'll all be programmed, sequenced, more electronic, and the presentation is going to be dead contrived, it's going to be arty..."

But won't this degree of art and artifice just be handing a stick to their critics with which they can be beaten?

"You mean won't it be pretentious and contrived?" asks Neil wilfully. "Well yeah, I think we are pretentious and contrived. I'm being the devil's advocate a bit here, but I like contrived music, I like pretentious music... I think the Pet Shop Boys are the last of the 1980s synth duos – that's the tradition I see ourselves in."

He also admits to another inducement to take to the road – it's the easiest way of finding out just who their fans are. He anticipates screaming 14-year-old girls at the front, dodgy characters in raincoats at the back, and he might not be too far adrift. Any band that is runner-up to A-ha in the *Smash Hits* best group poll while coming second to The Smiths in the *Record Mirror* equivalent can justifiably claim to inspire a schizophrenic following. Any band that follows its whim to put out a low-priced set of dance remixes so that it can call the record *Disco*, and which aims to feature collaborations with Dusty Springfield and Larry Blackmon on its next album, probably deserves such a following.

"I often have the feeling that we're underrated," says Neil Tennant, settling back into the beige upholstery, "but then I don't really like the B-plus school of rock criticism anyway – rated, underrated, overrated."

Whatever way you decide to complete your Pet Shop Boys scorecard, let me tell you this. When you go on your holidays and none of your friends are around, you can safely leave your hamster with Neil Tennant – and what higher endorsement can you offer a Pet Shop Boy? *Danny Kelly* •

1986

OCTOBER—DECEMBER

"No double chins": (l–r) Lawrence Hayward, Martin Duffy, Marco Thomas and Gary Aingein Moseley, Birmingham, 1986

"I'm deadly serious"

Will the genius of FELT be overlooked in favour of the eccentricities of their singer/songwriter LAWRENCE? He hopes not. "I can understand people finding it funny, and I don't mind provided they realise I'm not superficial about it."

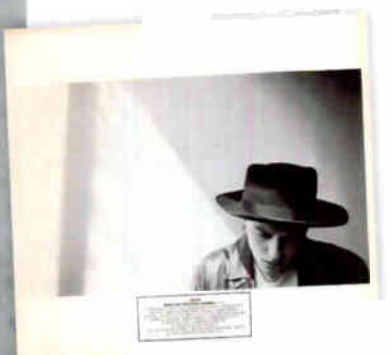
— NME NOVEMBER 8 —

"NO DOUBLE CHINS," the voice pleads with that hint of recurring desperation to which only the monotone drone of the West Midlands accent can do full justice. "No double chins..."

The voice has kept up this mantra for close on two hours. It belongs to Lawrence, mainspring of Birmingham's finest pop group, Felt, and is aimed at the band's other members as he fretfully directs them through a particularly arduous photo session at his Moseley flat.

When his turn beneath the lights arrives, the voice does not relent – "Have I got a DC? Have I?"

There's really no danger, because Lawrence punctuates every one of something approaching 100 shots with a sideways glance into a mirror that »



P.P. HARTNETT

never leaves his grasp. It had, after all, taken him fully half an hour to manoeuvre his baseball hat, and the fringe that flops from beneath it, into an arrangement that he considers optimum!

But, spectacular as it is, this performance, this War On Chops, turns out to be a mere overture for a symphony of Wonderland weirdness, a crack-pop crackpot story to match the best of 'em.

LAWRENCE'S DEEP DREAD of excess face is being exposed, I should explain, because Felt have, with their new, Creation-issued LP, Forever Breathes The Lonely Word, finally justified six years (and four previous albums) of slog and, it must be said, tantrum, wilfulness, indulgence and a notoriously erratic marshalling of obvious talent.

In some ways *Forever...* has come out of the blue, following, with indecent haste, their equally snappily titled *Let The Snakes Crinkle Their Heads To Death*. That, Felt being Felt, was a perverse, difficult collection of instrumentals. The band loved it, the critics laughed nervously, and Felt's fans cast it the determinedly averted gaze usually reserved for a neighbour's mentally retarded offspring.

The new arrival, by distinct contrast, is being cooed at and tickled under the (correctly shaped) chin by all who've heard it. It's a lattice of gloriously gloomy language clinging to an almost celebratory, Hammond-fuelled music that ought to be jarringly inappropriate but politely declines the role.

It's all in there – beat poetry, biblical wildcats, fawnish innocence and neon-bright pretension combining in a small triumph of literate pop. Its lyrical dexterity equals anything on even The Go-Betweens' *Liberty Belle And The Black Diamond Express* and the opening, non-comedy side of *The Queen Is Dead*. One of the year's absolute elite, it advances Felt to the very threshold of the door marked Restricted Area – Pop Stars Only.

Knowing which, of course, in no way prepares you for the triple-decker oddness of a day with Lawrence. You turn up tooled with your blurred mental Polaroids of half-finished shows, aborted interviews, unnatural fastidiousness and a reported sensitivity that'd make Liz Fraser, by comparison, a twin of the Kray variety. You know too that the blow-up doll on the cover of Creation's recent *Purveyors Of Taste* compilation belonged to Lawrence. But really these are mere splinters off a giant redwood of strangeness that, if *Forever...* gets its just desserts, will see *The Sun* tag this bony Brummie bundle of intensity as "Britain's Wackiest Star!".

Lawrence (so desperate to jettison his past that he's long since forgotten his surname) lives in a first-floor flat whose new-pin spickness and chintzy furnishings immediately distinguish it from the habitat of every other known rock species.

It smells different, too; a platoon of Airwick Solids stoically occupy strategic vantage points; the toilet bowl harbours not the usual one, but a breeding pair of those Cartland-pink sanitisers; a wicker basket provides a mass grave for spent aerosol air fresheners. The post-pub curry 'n' six-pack is, evidently, a ritual yet to desecrate this domain.

Later, I'll be shown hidden caches of classic records and a startling collection of first-edition Kerouac paperbacks, but initially the only clue that escapes the fierce tidiness are the 20 or so LPs stood neatly beneath the (dead giveaway, this) music centre. Judy Collins, Tim Hardin, '60s doomies Lee Hazelwood and Fred Neil, assorted obscurities on the Elektra label, and the compulsory Scott Walker. Here, Leonard Cohen would be considered too popular, Nick Drake too frivolous.

The ordeal by flashbulb survived, and his cronies (organist Martin Duffy, bassist Marco Thomas and drummer Gary Ainge) departed, we begin to talk.

Punctuated by panoramic pauses for thought, and imparted in a churchily quiet version of that toneless Birmingham whine, Lawrence's conversation is shockingly honest, by pop's standards almost guileless. In a single statement, sweetness, charm, stupidity and brilliance will jostle for space; acute instinctive insight will become over-read naivety in a sentence. Half the time you want to lean across his gleaming coffee table and pat him on the head – the rest, you'd gladly throttle him...

And within 15 minutes I've abandoned reams of carefully prepared questions and am pinballing wildly between dumbstruck disbelief and impolite laughter at the stream of undiluted eccentricity washing around me...

He has already, we learn, composed the next three Felt LPs (knows the titles, knows the running orders), has decided, after a recent major "think day", to cauterise any lingering trace of the past he left behind in the village of Water Orton, and he worries constantly about how his every move will look in the book that'll one day be written about his band – "Only it's not the Felt story; it's the Felt legend..."

But even this unfolding directory of dottiness pales as he describes a daily regime, the aim of which is to avoid contact with the outside world, to keep him hermetically sealed in his profoundly un-smelly living room...

"I'm trying to give up even the little bit of shopping I do, but, do you know, shops don't deliver any more," he deadpans, utterly serious. "I think that's really bad. If I could get all my stuff brought round on a Friday night, and my milk delivered – I need never go out..."

This self-imposed isolation – "in the city, but separate from it too" – is part of Lawrence's determined campaign to dedicate himself to "Art".

Lawrence talks a lot about "Art". He talks about it in a way that insists upon the capital "A". And he talks about it in subjective, abstracted, sort-of Elizabeth Barrett-Browningish ways long since discredited by the wars and harshnesses of the 20th century, and liable, I tell him, to render those still spouting them laughing stocks.

The flame of unworldliness doesn't even flicker. "Really? How odd. It all seems really credible to me, to be in an Art band. That's how I'd describe Felt..."

And what, then, constitutes a typical day for an Art band's leader?

"Basically, the day is very traumatic, 'cos I have to fill in the time... See, if I can waste the day 'til six o'clock, 'til the television comes on properly, then everything is fine...

"I don't go to bed 'til really late – and recently I haven't been sleeping anyway – so, I suppose, on average, I get up at about 10. Then I just... erm... read. I read for as long as I can stand it. And then I wash my hair. I wash my hair every day, 'cos that takes up quite a bit of time..."

Tactical hairdressing in the pursuit of untainted Artistry! Why hasn't anyone thought of it before? And aren't there drawbacks? Doesn't this lifestyle get lonely?

"Loneliness usually comes about every six months, usually on a Friday night. It just really gets you; you can't do anything to occupy the time, you know you have to survive, but you don't go out. You have to suffer."

Don't be so bloody stupid. There's no 'have to'. Just get up and go out!

"I'm not saying I'm a great person or anything – I never boast – but you just don't come across many interesting people, do you? I think my behaviour is like those people who used to torture their bodies. I think that maybe, subconsciously, I'm torturing myself because I haven't done, achieved, all that I want to out of life.

"It's as though I feel I've done nothing to deserve comfort. Years ago, I used to eat sweets. It sounds cracked, but, really, I used to eat a lot of sweets. I don't smoke, I don't drink, I don't do drugs, but I used to devour these sweets in front of the telly. But then I stopped. I just decided to stop, and that was the day I sort of realised that I was torturing myself."

> "Basically, the day is very traumatic, 'cos I have to fill in the time"

FELT

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What you appear to be suggesting is that you are, in fact (and it's probably something of a rarity for modern Birmingham), an aesthete.

"Yes, that's it! That's exactly the word I've been searching for. How do you spell it?"

Capital "N", "u", double "t", "e", "r".

You end up uncertain whether to admire or pity him – the man's dedication to, well, to the things he does, is apparently limitless. Less motivated mortals inevitably search for flaws in the artistic monasticism.

What did you do last Christmas Day?

"Oh, it was wonderful," he begins before skidding to a mental halt, "but it'll mean the *NME*'ll get hate mail directed at me – it's like the bloke from *Sounds* who wanted to punch me 'cos he thought I was so glum..."

What did you do last Christmas Day?

"I stayed here..."

On your own?

"Yes."

Did you have anything special to eat?

The day's longest pause and deepest blush coincide. "Yeah, I did... I had a whole... Do you know those turkey roast things?..."

The other (*NME* photographer) Lawrence and I abandon all effort at social niceties and convulse into agonies of giggling. Serenely unconcerned, and completely uninterested in sympathy, Felt's Lawrence witters on drily.

"I should add that there was no veg. I don't eat vegetables. I've never eaten a vegetable in my life..."

Did you pull a cracker?

"No, though I think I bought myself a present... Can't quite remember... Definitely got one for my birthday, though, from a girl I see..."

AAAAHHH!! Four *NME* ears prick up in formation. So, in the midst of all the air freshener, Art, Kerouac, shampoo and self-denial, there's... A Girlfriend!

Lawrence blushes anew. "Well, yes, but considering I don't leave here," the voice trails off to a whisper's shadow, "...and she lives in Windsor..."

> "My whole life is Felt. I do nothing else, apart from read"

WE REALLY DID try, earnestly and often, to talk about Felt's lovely new album, but it didn't work out. The record Lawrence recorded is not the one I hear...

His is a totally unique new music, without precedent; mine owes much to, among others, Bob Dylan. Mine appears to be dripping with religious references; his, apparently, features just a single mention of Jesus. Both records are brilliant, mind, we agree on that; they're just not the same.

So, we really did try to talk about Felt's lovely new album, but it didn't work out. Altogether more successfully harvested (and, given that notorious reticence regarding interviews, I suppose we should be thankful) were the (surprise, surprise) idiosyncratic thoughts of Lawrence on...

FAME: "That'd be fine, really. I have some of it now, but this place makes it OK. There's no door to the street, so I just pick up the entryphone and if I don't want whoever it is to come up I'll just say, 'Sorry, I'm busy'..."

FUN: "Yeah, honest, I do have a good time. When? When we play... Well, not actually on stage... but going to the concert, in the van, is great. When we get there, and on the way back, it's terrible..."

NEWS: "I never, never, watch the news. I hate... I just refuse to know about world matters. I'm not one bit interested. And I never read newspapers. Tell a lie – I bought one when George Best went to prison. I know nothing about football, but I'm really interested in him. I've got a Manchester United shirt in the cupboard..."

HOBBIES: "If you don't put your whole life into the music, it's not right. I mean, my whole life is Felt. I do nothing else, apart from read, which is an extension anyway. I love Art. I don't have a hobby. I hate all hobbies... except Vic Godard playing golf. That's OK, spot on...

"I can understand people finding it funny, and I don't mind provided they realise the most important thing, that I'm not superficial about it, I'm deadly serious. I'm deadly serious about my life, about what I do, about Felt."

Y'see, Lawrence knows that by the home-owning, twin-set, multiple-orgasm standards of most of his contemporaries, he's an oddball, maybe a freak; he's been informed by no less an authority than myself that he exhibits all the signs of being in a condition we on the fringes of the established medical mafia as call Stark Raving Bonkers; and, provided his music, his precious Art, is taken seriously, he doesn't much care...

But we should, because we can make use of his very difference; it, and Felt as a whole, can throw into violent relief the vast majority of the rest of Pop's writhing, grasping circus.

In his (cultivated) innocence he betrays Pop's habitual contrivance; in his determined Artiness, he spotlights Pop's callous courtship of the lowest common denominator; in his masochistic search for perfection he points up Pop's slavering lust for mediocrity; and through his latest music he devastatingly demonstrates the craven, facile, illiterate, avaricious and ossifyingly dull nature of most mainstream music.

Felt are in love with, and need, real, pure, Pop. And Pop, as surely as Queen's next brain-rot video-jingle smasheroo, needs Felt. *Danny Kelly* •

RUMBLING THE ANTISEPTIC BEAUTY

Epic gestures of martyrdom

MM DEC 20/27 The Smiths go "positively grungy" playing an anti-apartheid benefit.

PERHAPS THIS ANTI-APARTHEID benefit will finally knock on the bonce the interminable "Is Morrissey a racist?" debate. Not that it isn't pertinent to talk about the gulf, the antipathy even, between indiepop and black pop. But the irony is that it's precisely the indie fans most estranged from black culture who are most likely to be anti-racist and politically committed. This was an anti-apartheid concert with a near-total absence of black faces in the audience.

But then The Smiths are one of the great white rock bands (they have a surprisingly manly audience, laddish even). Smiths music is about as albino as you can get this side of The Fall – an amalgam of rockabilly, "Jeepster"-ish chords and folk-rock, low on sensuality, high on yearning. R'n'B is a remote, fourth-hand trace.

BRIXTON ACADEMY LONDON
LIVE!
DECEMBER 12

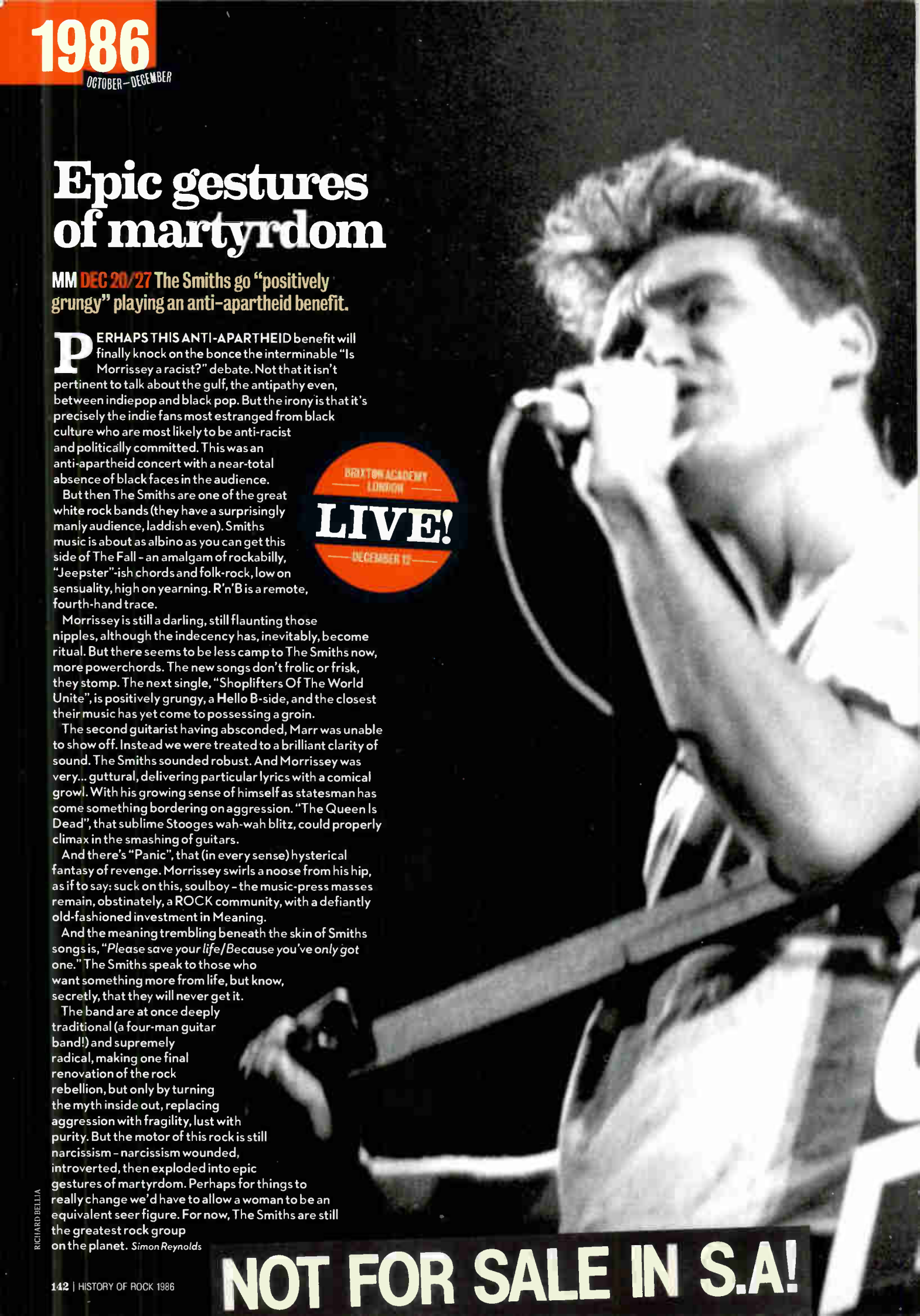
Morrissey is still a darling, still flaunting those nipples, although the indecency has, inevitably, become ritual. But there seems to be less camp to The Smiths now, more powerchords. The new songs don't frolic or frisk, they stomp. The next single, "Shoplifters Of The World Unite", is positively grungy, a Hello B-side, and the closest their music has yet come to possessing a groin.

The second guitarist having absconded, Marr was unable to show off. Instead we were treated to a brilliant clarity of sound. The Smiths sounded robust. And Morrissey was very... guttural, delivering particular lyrics with a comical growl. With his growing sense of himself as statesman has come something bordering on aggression. "The Queen Is Dead", that sublime Stooges wah-wah blitz, could properly climax in the smashing of guitars.

And there's "Panic", that (in every sense) hysterical fantasy of revenge. Morrissey swirls a noose from his hip, as if to say: suck on this, soulboy – the music-press masses remain, obstinately, a ROCK community, with a defiantly old-fashioned investment in Meaning.

And the meaning trembling beneath the skin of Smiths songs is, "*Please save your life/Because you've only got* one." The Smiths speak to those who want something more from life, but know, secretly, that they will never get it.

The band are at once deeply traditional (a four-man guitar band!) and supremely radical, making one final renovation of the rock rebellion, but only by turning the myth inside out, replacing aggression with fragility, lust with purity. But the motor of this rock is still narcissism – narcissism wounded, introverted, then exploded into epic gestures of martyrdom. Perhaps for things to really change we'd have to allow a woman to be an equivalent seer figure. For now, The Smiths are still the greatest rock group on the planet. *Simon Reynolds*



RICHARD BELLIA

Growling confidence: Morrissey fronts a robust Smiths performance at the Brixton Academy, December 12, 1986

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

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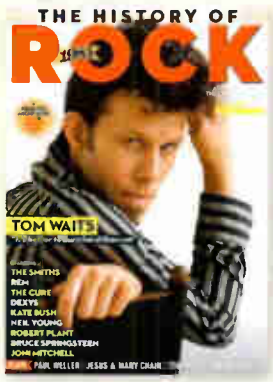

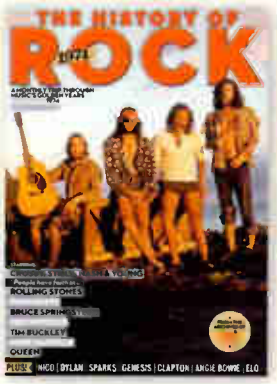

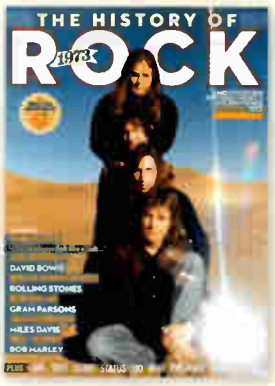

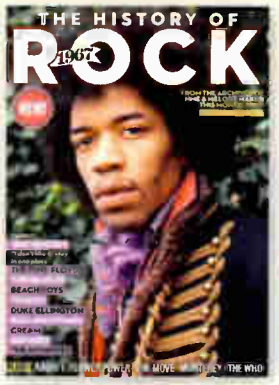

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Readers' letters

MM/NME JUL–DEC Hellraisin', Housemartin smothering, George licking and more.

Beastie burden

Pleased as we were to find our acts Run DMC and the Beastie Boys on the cover of your September 13 issue, we can't help but comment about the oddness of their tone..

Our objections to Steve Sutherland's piece on the Beastie Boys [page 112] are substantial. With regard to The Raisin' Hell Tour – which featured Run DMC, Whodini, LL Cool J and the Beastie Boys – he claims that "the guns came out in Long Beach, California" and that our national press "made a meal of it... deaths, race riots, that sort of thing".

Sutherland's casual attitude regarding this alleged violence may pass for raffishness, but his equally casual attitude regarding the truth (which he sneeringly describes as "the DMC line") is unacceptable. In fact, there were no deaths at Long Beach, nor anywhere else on the tour. Further, there were no race riots.

As the Beasties themselves told Sutherland, Long Beach was the site of a gang fight, and it was the only date on the tour (70-odd dates in 65 cities) that had to be stopped because of violence in the arena.

Finally, the result of the fiasco in Long Beach was not that the tour was cancelled in "other major cities". It was cancelled in one city, Providence, Rhode Island, a decision decried as "a bush-league move" by that city's *Providence Journal*. You'll excuse the extended baseball metaphor, but the *Journal*'s Mike Boehm went on to note that "providing security for Run DMC is like having to face Nolan Ryan's fastball. But if you're a pro, you don't call off the game. You do what's necessary to stay in it."

You know, just as the Hammersmith Odeon did this past September 12 and 13 when The Raisin' Hell tour came to your town and went off without incident. **BILL ADLER, director of publicity, Rush Productions, New York**

Seems to be a fair week of paranoia issuing out of your offices at the moment. It was Run DMC's OWN press agent who informed me that American national press made a meal of the riots and it was never implied in my piece that there was any truth in these rumours of racial tension. On the contrary, part of my thinking behind the Beastie Boys piece was to dispel hip hop's rapidly solidifying bad reputation. SS **(MM Oct 4)**

Alas Smith

So The Cure is the "best band in the world"? How many drinks did they have to buy you to inspire such a comment? All the space you waste detailing your delightful escapades with Richard Butler and Robert Smith could be spent on bands like The Beloved and The Soup Dragons, or even more established groups who are still creative, like The Smiths. But then most indie groups are too poor to take you along on ocean cruises, and Morrissey, with his "anti-everything" attitude, probably doesn't often get pissed at the pub. **SOMEONE WITH THE NAME OF A FAMOUS FILM DIRECTOR, Michigan, USA (MM Jul 19)**

Hull 4 Media 4

1986 and the new breed is nowhere to be seen, but hark, what is this? A small glimmer of hope among the black-soul-funk-disco-beat pop that fills the charts. The Housemartins burst onto the scene with their new fresh but not entirely original style.

But all this was too much to hope for. Smothered by the music press, by Radio 1 and *Top Of The Pops*, The Housemartins are turned into yet another pop band of the '80s, never to reach their full potential. I could be wrong, and truly hope I am. Housemartins, RIP. **HUNT, St Albans, Herts (MM Jul 19)**

Crowd 4 Small person 0

I'd like to say three words to the people who went to the Housemartins gig at the Mayfair in Newcastle and who kept pushing (downstairs) before The Housemartins came on – YOU SELFISH BASTARDS! I thought I was going to suffocate and had to go upstairs – only to find out I couldn't see, so I had to sit on the stairs and listen to the show... I can do that ANYTIME. Bastards like that should be thrown out. **ANDREA, Durham (MM Oct 25)**

Go-go, going, gone

I love Wham! and I don't care who knows it, so up yours, Sutherland! I'd have given my left limb to have been at Wembley the other week. Why couldn't I have your ticket, Sutherland? Wham! shall be sadly missed, and George Michael, if you happen to be reading this, I love you and I want to smear your body with Instant Whip and lick it off, then we could... **Carolyn Byrne, Cleethorpes (MM Jul 19)**

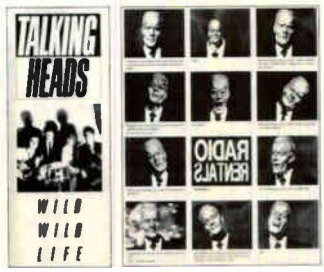
Scot difference it does make

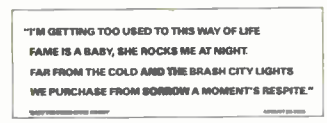
Dear Morrissey and Rough Trade, I was looking forward to your forthcoming tour as it would give me another chance to see my heroes in action. At least that's what I thought until I saw the dates.

For the second year in succession you have chosen to exclude Scotland from your major tour. Granted, last year you did a mini-tour of Scotland and played Glasgow in July, but there is more to Scotland than just Glasgow. What about the people in the east of Scotland who haven't seen you for a year, and also all those in the west who couldn't get a ticket for the Glasgow gig? It means now that I have to travel to Carlisle, and although I am prepared to do it, a journey to Glasgow would be much easier and a lot cheaper. Don't forget – people in Scotland also buy Smiths records and we wouldn't mind seeing you play live now and then. **A PANIC-STRICKEN CHARMING MAN, Coatbridge, Scotland (MM Sept 20)**

Blast from the past

You are mistaken. I am not, nor have I ever been, a member of the Groucho Club. Like many of your staff, I go there occasionally to see my friends. The context in which you claimed membership for me was blatantly derogatory, and could be seen as considerably detrimental to my reputation. Would you like to retract, or would you like to be sued? **Julie Burchill Landesman, London (NME Nov 23)**




"I'M GETTING TOO USED TO THIS WAY OF LIFE
FAME IS A BABY, SHE ROCKS ME AT NIGHT
FAR FROM THE COLD AND THE BRASH CITY LIGHTS
WE PURCHASE FROM SORROW A MOMENT'S RESPITE."

Coming next... in 1987!

So... That was 1986. Kiss!

But that's far from it from our reporters on the beat. The staffers of *NME* and *Melody Maker* enjoyed unrivalled access to the biggest stars of the time, and cultivated a feel for the rhythms of a diversifying scene; as the times changed, so did they. While in pursuit of the truth, they unearthed stories that have come to assume mythical status.

That's very much the territory of this monthly magazine. With each issue, *The History Of Rock* will be bringing you verbatim reports from the pivotal events in pop culture, one year a month, one year at a time. Next up, 1987!

U2

THE BAND READY *The Joshua Tree*, and Bono continues to cultivate a different echelon. "I met Muhammad Ali, you know – he's a U2 fan. I was completely blown away by it. I just thought, 'This is one of the greatest sportsmen who ever stepped into the spotlight. A man with real class. A man with a real sense of humour.' Even when Muhammad Ali's in a bad way, he's still good enough for me."

REM

AN INTIMATE MEETING with the band that has just made *Document*. "In America, if you can't make money, they think it's because you're a failure," says Peter Buck. "The work ethic is really intrinsic to American thought. The idea that you can work and work and get what you want and then try for even more. It's the American dream, but it's a pipe dream..."

PRIMAL SCREAM

GRADUATES OF THE class of 1986, and rock fanatics. "You've got it or you haven't," says Bobby Gillespie. "For us it's about having a certain spirit. All the best things I've seen this year have it. The Weather Prophets in Edinburgh. Neil Young at Wembley..."

PLUS!

THE CURE!

JULIAN COPE!

DAVID BOWIE!

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

THE HISTORY OF ROCK 1986

Every month, we revisit long-lost *NME* and *Melody Maker* interviews and piece together *The History Of Rock*. This month: 1986.
"Sometimes I wish life was never-ending..."

Relive the year...

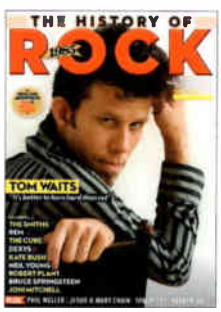
PRINCE TORE THE ROOF OFF LONDON

THE BEASTIE BOYS FOUGHT FOR THEIR RIGHTS

KEITH RICHARDS DEFENDED THE HONOUR OF THE STONES

...and **NEW ORDER, JOHN LYDON, THE SMITHS, GEORGE MICHAEL, NICK CAVE, THE FALL** and many more shared all with the writers from *NME* and *MELODY MAKER*

More from **UNCUT**...



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